





Kenneth C. Ph. Sills

August 1985

from the author

Alfred C. Williams

August 1900

for the author





# THE BEACON BIOGRAPHIES

EDITED BY

M. A. DEWOLFE HOWE

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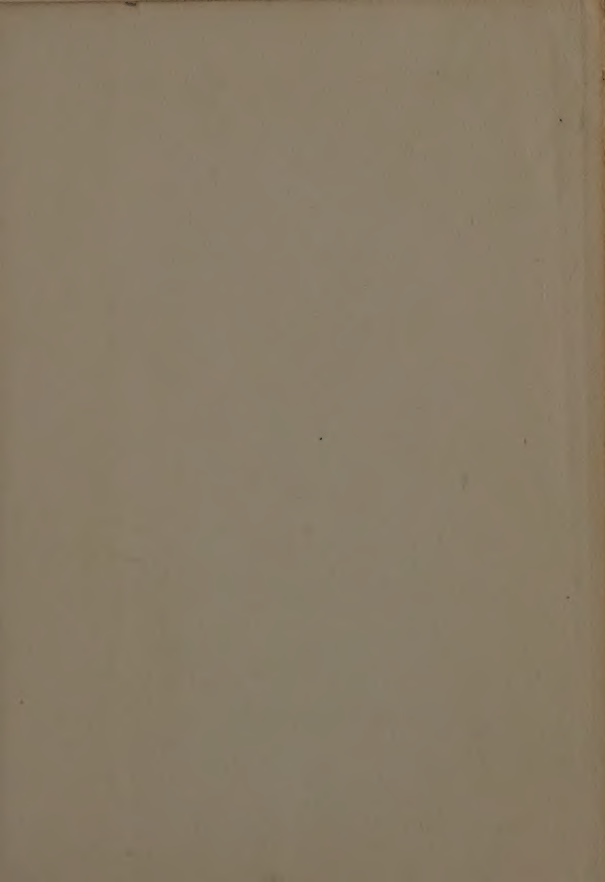
EDWIN BOOTH

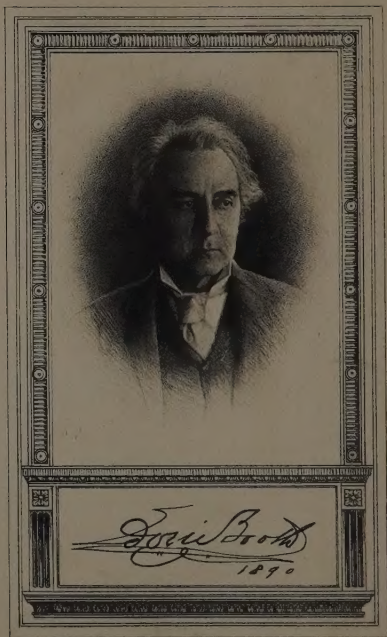
BY

CHARLES TOWNSEND COPELAND









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THE  
*Seacon Biographies*  
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*M. A. De Wolfe Howe*



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EDWIN BOOTH

BY

CHARLES TOWNSEND COPELAND



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MDCCCCI

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*The photogravure used as a frontispiece to this volume is from a copy of a photograph taken in 1890 by Mr. Ignatius Grossmann, Booth's son-in-law. Booth sent this copy to Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich, with a letter from which the following words, giving his own opinion of the likeness, are taken :*

*“the whole thing, [the Sargent portrait] even the long thin legs & graceless trousers are me & mine. I have a photograph for you whose expression is very similar, & wh. I consider the best of me ever made: it was done by chance by Grossmann one day last Summer, at the Pier; I liked it so well that he had it enlarged & finished properly & I had a few for my friends struck off. The absence of theatrical effect &c, is its great merit & that is what pleases me in Sargent's portrait.*

*“ Love for you all, God bless you.*

*“ ED WIN.”*

*The present engraving is by John Andrew & Son, Boston.*





IN MEMORIAM D. B.



## PREFACE.

*Without Mr. William Winter's full and authoritative "Life and Art of Edwin Booth," this book could not have been written. It owes less yet much to "The Elder and the Younger Booth," by the late Mrs. J. S. Clarke; and to "Edwin Booth: Recollections by his Daughter, Edwina Booth Grossmann; and Letters to her and to his Friends."*

*The writer is greatly indebted to Mr. Aldrich for permission to print hitherto unpublished letters of Booth, and for the loan of the rare photograph reproduced as frontispiece.*

*The writer is obliged to Messrs. Houghton, Mifflin & Co., and to Mr. Aldrich, for permission to reprint the poem entitled "Sargent's Portrait of Edwin Booth at 'The Players.'"*

C. T. C.

CAMBRIDGE, 8 November, 1901.



## CHRONOLOGY.

1833

*November 13.* Edwin Booth was born at Belair, Maryland.

1849

First appearance on the stage, at Boston Museum.

1851

Acted *Richard III* for the first time.

1852

Went to California with his father. His father died.

1854

Visited Australia, Samoan and Sandwich Islands.

1857

*April 20.* Appeared at Boston Theatre as *Sir Giles Overreach*.

1860

*July 7.* Married Miss Mary Devlin and sailed soon afterwards for England.

1861

*September.* First appearance in London, as *Shylock*.

1861 (*continued*)

*December* 9. Edwina Booth born at Fulham, London.

1862

*September* 29. Reappearance in New York.

1863

*February* 21. Death of Mary Devlin Booth.

*September* 21. Took management of Winter Garden Theatre, New York.

1864

*November* 25. Produced "Julius Cæsar" at Winter Garden Theatre; Junius, Edwin, and John Wilkes Booth in cast.

*November* 26. Produced "Hamlet" at Winter Garden Theatre.

1865

*March* 22. One hundredth night of "Hamlet" at Winter Garden Theatre.

*April* 14. Lincoln assassinated by John Wilkes Booth.

Retired from the stage.

1866

*January 3.* Reappeared at Winter Garden Theatre, as *Hamlet*.

1867

*January 22.* Presentation of Hamlet Medal.

*January 28.* Revival of "The Merchant of Venice" at Winter Garden Theatre.

*March 22-23.* Winter Garden Theatre destroyed by fire.

1868

*April 8.* Corner-stone of Booth's Theatre, New York, laid.

*November 3.* Appeared in "Macbeth," Boston Theatre, with Mme. Janaushek.

1869

*February 3.* Booth's Theatre opened with "Romeo and Juliet."

*April 12.* Produced "Othello."

*June 7.* Married Miss Mary F. M'Vicker of Chicago.

1871

*December 25.* Produced "Julius Cæsar" at Booth's Theatre.

1873

Retired from management.

1874

Went into bankruptcy.

1875

*March.* Released from bankruptcy.

Thrown from carriage at Cos-Cob, Connecticut ; seriously injured.

*October 25.* Reappeared in New York, at Fifth Avenue Theatre.

1876

*January 3–March 3.* Successful tour of southern states. Revisited California.

*November 20.* Began long engagement in New York.

1877–78

Fifteen volumes of *Prompt-Books* (William Winter, editor) published.

1879

*April 23.* Mark Gray's attempt to assassinate Booth, at Chicago.

1880

*April.* Appeared as *Petruchio*, Madison



Square Theatre, New York, for benefit of Poe Memorial.

*June 15.* Booth festival at Delmonico's.

*June 30.* Sailed for England.

*November 6.* Appeared at Princess's Theatre, London, as *Hamlet*.

## 1881

Presented "King Lear."

*March 29.* Ended season at Princess's Theatre, London.

*May 2.* Appeared at Lyceum Theatre, London, as *Othello*, Henry Irving *Iago*.

*October 3.* Reappeared in New York, Booth's Theatre.

*November 13.* Death of Mary M'Vicker Booth.

## 1882

*May 31.* Sailed for England.

*June 25.* Reappeared at Princess's Theatre, London.

## 1883

*January 11.* Appeared at Berlin.

Tour of Germany.

*April 7.* Closed tour at Vienna. Returned to America.

1885

*May* 4. Delivered address at dedication of Poe Memorial, Metropolitan Museum, New York.

*May* 7. Appeared in "Macbeth" with Mme. Ristori at Academy of Music, New York.

1886

*April* 27-30 and *May* 1. Appeared in "Hamlet" and "Othello" with Salvini at Academy of Music, New York.

Booth-Barrett combination formed.

1887

Delivered address at dedication of Actors' Monument, Long Island.

1888

*May* 21. Appeared as *Hamlet* at testimonial benefit for Lester Wallack, Metropolitan Opera House, New York.

*December* 31. Founded The Players.

1889

Mme. Modjeska joined the Booth-Barrett Company.

1889 (*continued*)

*April 3.* Had a light stroke of paralysis at Rochester, New York.

1891

*March 20.* Death of Lawrence Barrett.

*April 4.* Last appearance on the stage, as *Hamlet*.

1893

*June 7.* Edwin Booth died at The Players, New York City.



EDWIN BOOTH



## EDWIN BOOTH.

### I.

JUNIUS BRUTUS BOOTH, known for many years in this country as "the elder Booth," was born on the first day of May, 1796, in the parish of St. Pancras, London. Through his grandmother, Elizabeth Wilkes, he was related to the famous John Wilkes, and through his mother he came of a Welsh family named Llewellyn. Thus both the elder and the younger Booth had in them that strain of Celtic blood so often found in English actors, artists, and writers. "The Booths and Wilkes of Clerkenwell," writes Mrs. J. S. Clarke in her memoir of her father, "were honourably known in their time; the house of Bishop Burnet, an historical old building, was the birthplace of many of the Booths, and the yard of the ancient church of St. John of Jerusalem still contains the gravestones of their descendants, on which the names of the

two families are frequently intermingled. Ruin and demolition have been busy, the black mould of years is over the narrow streets and by-ways; but the little court keeps its name of 'Booth,' and the graves in the narrow slip of church-ground seem likely to last till doomsday."

Richard, the father of J. B. Booth, was educated for the law; but his devotion to a profession more firmly attached to precedent than any other—except perhaps that of his son and grandsons—was not enough to keep him from becoming a red Republican and resolving to fight for England's American colonies against the mother-country. After being taken prisoner and brought back to England, Booth addressed himself to study, and the practice of law. Although he seems not to have been punished for his disloyalty, a freely proclaimed republicanism kept him unpopular. Richard Booth's rule that



everyone who entered his Bloomsbury drawing-room should bow before a portrait of Washington that hung there, was probably the most whimsical manifestation of his principles. Clearly indicative of these were also the names of his two sons, Junius Brutus and Algeron Sidney.

After a brief rivalry with Kean, J. B. Booth came to try his fortune in the new world, where he was long and widely known for his great genius and even greater eccentricity. On the eighteenth of January, 1821, he had married Mary Anne Holmes, and the same year found them at Norfolk, Virginia. The young actor's gifts and oddities were combined with a strong desire for a quiet country life when he was not acting. So, after a number of brilliant engagements, in the summer of 1822 he bought a farm in Harford County, Maryland, twenty-five miles from Baltimore. He passed much time there, and there his six sons and four daughters were born.

Known always as "The Farm," this estate was really a wood, three miles from each of three small villages — Bel-air, Hickory, and Churchville. Over the stony coach-road, through an arch of great trees, the post-boy, with his horn and mail-bags, used to ride once a week, and toss the Booths' letters and papers over their gate. The house was a quarter of a mile from the gate, by a narrow, crooked path. The house, it should be said, was no more than a log-cabin, as innocent of locks and bolts as if it had been in Arcadia. The square window-frames and broad shutters of the cabin — which was plastered and whitewashed on the outside — were painted red. "Four rooms besides the loft, the kitchen, and the Old Dominion chimney, made up a picturesque and comfortable abode, standing in a clearing encompassed by huge oak, black walnut, beech, and tulip trees." Booth caused his cabin to be removed across several fields, in order to

bring it near an excellent spring which he had discovered under the thickest trees. These were left standing, and the spring was furnished with granite ledges and steps. "In its grateful depths," continues Mrs. Clarke, "dwelt an immense green bull-frog; and as these creatures are said to live a hundred years, the children of the family used to imagine that he had croaked to the first invaders of his solitude as he did to them. In this shaded spot a little dairy was built, and the thoughtful possessor planted in front of his door a cherry-shoot, anticipating the future when his children should gather under its branches. Those days came in their time, and his tall sons swung themselves up among its great boughs, to read or doze away many a sultry afternoon. Merry groups gossiped under its shelter, little ones danced there, while older ones dreamed, and reared airy castles; the aged mother in her widowhood remem-

bered happier days in its shadows ; and every year the orioles and mocking-birds paid their welcome visits. This grand old grafted tree was very tall and straight, and shaded the entire lawn."

In his green clearing, circled by unbroken forest as far as the eye could reach, the Farmer—the world forgetting, though not by the world forgot—planted a large orchard, and had negro quarters, barns, and stables, built. Among other necessities added to the Farm, were a vineyard, a cider-press, and a fishing stream : among its luxuries was a swimming-pond, with a little willow-grown island.

In a few years, when it became necessary to provide for the dead as well as for the living, a little graveyard was railed in. With true Southern refusal to join in death those who in life were so far asunder, Booth buried black members of his large household outside of the enclosure, which was shaded with

Jewish althea bushes, yews, and weeping willows. The white dead were laid within the rails. As clergymen were usually no nearer than the rest of civilisation, the owner of all this seclusion often found it a part of his duty to read the burial service.

Within the cabin the master of it typified his two fold life by keeping in one file the numbers of a weekly paper on farming, and in another, playbills. Incidents and pleasures of the farm life he minutely described in a note-book, along with passages from plays, memoranda of dresses and properties, stage directions, births and deaths of children, astronomical observations, fast days, and lastly a few verses.

On the Actor-Farmer's few but catholic book-shelves, stood volumes of Shelley, Coleridge, and Keats—new poets then—a Gazetteer of the World, an English and a French dictionary, Racine, Alfieri, Tasso, Dante, Burton's *An-*

*atomy of Melancholy*, Plutarch's *Morals and Lives*, Milton, Shakespeare, the Koran (by which the elder Booth set great store), Locke's *Essay on the Human Understanding*, and Paley's *Theology*.

On the parlour walls hung three engravings — "Timon of Athens," "The Roman Matron showing her Husband how to Die," and "The Death of Bonaparte," "with these words written in the clouds, 'Tête d'Armée.'" The furniture of the cabin, though simple and rough, was of a sort that is looked upon with increasing interest and affection. The corner cupboard, full of old-fashioned china; a narrow looking-glass, with the sun and moon (in the guise of human faces) painted on the upper half; the spinning wheel; the tall brass andirons and fender — all these objects, even without the particular association, would be cherished as household reminders of former times. The old Herbalist and Almanack, side

by side on the wall, the ink-horn, bunch of quills, and little bags of seeds, hung from hooks round the looking-glass, added harmonious details to a picture strangely contrasted with the scenes in which the world thinks of the elder and the younger Booth. The family bread was baked in a Dutch oven, the family meals eaten from immense pewter platters, which were used in later days as covers to the milk-crocks in the dairy. A rigid vegetarianism was practised on the Farm. "Mr. Booth usually travelled from Harford County to Baltimore and to Richmond in his carryall with two horses — 'Captain,' a very large animal, and the favourite but diminutive 'Peacock,' " a piebald pony bought on the island of Madeira.

It has seemed worth while to recite all these details of Edwin Booth's first home, not only for their interest, but because they were so very different from everything in and about his last home, the

Players' Club in New York. Between the two, we have only the most general record of any of his abodes.

A word or two as to the physical aspect of father and son will be a further help to most readers. The father was short, spare, and sinewy. He had the head of a Greek, the chest of an athlete, and a face of the pallor often though not always seen in scholars. His hair was dark, and his eyes blue-grey. His voice ranged from organ to flute. Mr. Joseph Jefferson's brief description of his acting, to be found in the *Autobiography*, is worth most of the many others scattered through books of reminiscence and criticism. "When but twenty-two years of age," says Mr. Jefferson, "I was cast for *Marrall* in 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts,' the elder Booth playing *Sir Giles Overreach*. . . . The elder Booth's acting of *Sir Giles* was indeed something to be remembered. During the last scene he beats *Marrall*, who hides for protec-



tion behind *Lord Lovell*. Booth's face, when he found he could not reach his victim, had the look of an uncaged tiger. His eyes flashed and seemed to snap with fire; his nostrils dilated; his cheeks appeared to quiver; his half-opened mouth, with its thin lips pressed tightly against the white teeth, made a picture of anger fearful to look upon. At the point where he is about to draw his sword his arm shakes, his right hand refuses to do its office, and, stricken with paralysis, he stands the embodiment of despair; then come his terrible words of anguish and self-reproach:

'Some undone widow sits upon mine arm,  
          my sword,  
Glued to my scabbard, with wronged  
orphans' tears.'

His whole frame, shaken with convulsions, seems to collapse, his head sinks upon his breast, his jaw drops, and the cruel man is dead. There was no ap-

plause the night I speak of; the acting was so intense and so natural that the mimic scenes seemed really to have happened." We have all sat through scenes followed by no applause, though not for the reason given by Mr. Jefferson. But the audiences of half a century ago and more were either more impressionable than those of to-day, or else, as the survivors affirm, they had better reason for being impressed. Certain it is that Mrs. Siddons and Kean and the elder Booth had a power over their houses that even Salvini has not exercised in our own time.

It is also clear that in bodily presence the elder Booth was more imposing, though not more brilliant, than the younger. Yet there was a resemblance between them—a resemblance that showed itself mainly in the shape of head and face; in the arch of eyebrow, "the actor's feature" for which both men were notable; and in a mo-

bility and positive radiance of face that were among Edwin Booth's most beautiful endowments. His eyes were dark brown, and so full of light that boys and girls often kept the look of them as almost the sole recollection of plays in which they had seen him. I, for one, saw Booth's *Shylock* at a very early age; and for years after, I remember, the Jew to me was nothing but a pair of eyes, large, dark, awful, and bright—above all, bright, and seeming to give out light. In the opinion of Mr. William Winter, “only one man of our time has equalled Edwin Booth in this singular splendour of countenance—the great New England orator Rufus Choate. Had Choate been an actor upon the stage—as he was before a jury—with those terrible eyes of his, and that passionate Arab face, he must have towered fully to the height of the tradition of George Frederick Cooke.” In poise, grace, and swiftness of motion, for which

the elder Booth was famous, neither he nor any one could well have surpassed his son. Of the middle height and size, the younger Booth was closely knit and admirably proportioned. His physical command of himself recalled the German traveller's note that Garrick seemed all right hand, so that within Booth's easy achievement were the march of *Othello*, *Iago's* leopard tread, and the tottering majesty of *Lear*. His voice, although a little "veiled"—at least in later years—ranged wide and carried far. Its sweetness and strength spoke to the inner even more than to the outer ear. It stirred not only the blood but the spirit.

## II.

THE youth of this rare person was schooled by constant association with a man of genius, and saddened by his strange, almost mad perversities. But in forming an artist and disciplining a character, the privilege of being son to the elder Booth far outweighed the frequent penalty of acting as his guardian.

Edwin Thomas Booth — Edwin after Edwin Forrest — was born at the Maryland farm on November 13, 1833. The negroes said he was “born lucky” and “gifted to see ghosts,” because there was a brilliant shower of meteors on the night of the boy’s birth, and because he was born with a caul. His first recollection of his father was of their having travelled a whole day together and reaching the Farm late at night, under the dark trees. A man who had come with them to take back the hired horses they had ridden, went away into the night; and Booth

lifted his little son over the snake-fence into the grass, saying as he did so — “Your foot is on your native heath.”

The boy's education began under Miss Susan Hyde, who taught the rudiments to boys and girls. Miss Hyde, who afterward became secretary of the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, was always affectionately remembered by her most distinguished pupil. Somewhat later, Booth sent his son to an old Frenchman, a West-Indian naval officer, M. Louis Dugas. He went — probably for a very short time — to “a university” which Mrs. Clarke does not name ; and studied intermittently with a Mr. Kearney, who wrote all his own school-books. Kearney encouraged his boys to act scenes from plays, and on one occasion the elder Booth, sitting on the corner of a bench near the door, was an unseen and a gratified witness of the quarrel between *Brutus* and *Cassius*, recited with gestures by Edwin Booth and John S.

Clarke, whose delightful art afterward led him quite away from tragedy. The young Romans wore white linen trousers and black jackets, then the fashion. Mr. J. H. Hewitt, of Baltimore, remembered Edwin as "a comely lad . . . dressed in a Spanish cloak."

A varied education was made still more fragmentary by periodical trips, on which Edwin Booth had the responsible task of caring for the health and even the safety of his father. In Louisville, to give one example of the sort of thing that often happened, Booth had on a certain night been playing *Richard III* with great brilliancy. On the way to his hotel he suddenly determined to walk the streets alone. When he found that Edwin would not leave him, he went rapidly to a long covered market, in which he began to walk up and down. The promenade, from end to end of the market, did not cease until daylight. Now hastening, now lagging,

the father could not shake off his son, who — sometimes angry, sometimes ready to laugh, and always weary — kept his father's changing pace until morning moved Booth to go home to bed. During the whole time neither had spoken a word.

It is not strange that such experiences as these should have made a sensitive youth grave beyond his years ; or that more painful demands upon his patience and courage, with no anodyne of the absurd, should have deepened his inherited melancholy. The noble motto of the noble Italian house, "Though sad, I am strong," might well have been this boy's. And at only one moment of later life, in the disaster that almost crushed him, could he have felt its sadness or needed its strength more than in the early, hard probation of being attendant, dresser, and guardian, to a man whose genius was not without its authenticating strain of madness.



In spite of all this association with the theatre, the actor's son saw little of its processes. His father intended him to be a cabinet-maker. "During my constant attendance on him in the theatre"—says Edwin Booth in "Some Words about my Father"—"he forbade my quitting his dressing-room—where he supposed my school-lessons were studied. But the idle boy, ignoring Lindley Murray and such small deer, seldom seeing the actors, listened at the keyhole to the garbled text of the mighty dramatists, as given in the acting versions of the plays. By this means at an early age my memory became stored with the words of *all* the parts of every play in which my father performed." It is common knowledge that the loss of one sense often sharpens the others. Who shall say that so much hearing without seeing, did not tune the listener's ear, and train unconsciously the tongue that was afterward to rob the Hybla bees?

Not only was the boy forbidden to see plays, but he seldom heard his father speak of actors or the theatre. Only once, indeed, was he allowed to hear any of the elder Booth's recollections of the stage. This was on an occasion when, after reading "Coriolanus" to his son "until far into the morning, he spoke of the marvellous acting of Edmund Kean."

Clearly enough, however, Edwin Booth's hereditary talent, his delphic association with the theatre, his strange responsibilities, and the grotesque contrasts of his life, were hurrying the neglectful grammar-student into a closer walk with "the mighty dramatists" to whom he had hearkened so attentively. Yet, when he made his first appearance on any stage, it was by accident, and — characteristically enough — to do some one a kindness. Mr. Thoman, who doubled the parts of prompter and actor, was attending to some detail in prepara-

tion for the elder Booth's *Richard III* at the Boston Museum. Suddenly he turned to Edwin, who was standing by, and exclaimed:—"This is too much work for one man; *you* ought to play *Tressel*." The boy consented, and, when the night of the play came—it was September 10, 1849—he was called to his father's dressing-room. Booth, dressed for *Richard*, then catechised his son as if the two had been teacher and pupil:

" 'Who was *Tressel*?' "

" 'A messenger from the field of Tewkesbury.' "

" 'What was his mission?' "

" 'To bear the news of the defeat of the king's party.' "

" 'How did he make the journey?' "

" 'On horseback.' "

" 'Where are your spurs?' "

" Edwin glanced quickly down"—he had doubtless told the story more than once to Mrs. Clarke, from whose account the dialogue is taken—"and said he had not thought of them.

“ ‘Here, take mine.’

“Edwin unbuckled his father’s spurs, and fastened them on his own boots. His part being ended on the stage, he found his father still sitting in the dressing-room, apparently engrossed in thought.

“ ‘Have you done well?’ he asked.

“ ‘I think so,’ replied Edwin.

“ ‘Give me my spurs,’ rejoined his father, and obediently young *Tressel* replaced the spurs upon *Gloucester’s* feet.”

The only copy of the bill of this performance which is known to be in existence, was given by the actor of *Tressel* to the Players’ Club, where it hangs in the dining-room.

What followed the performance is no less interesting than what preceded. By that time the Roman father had softened. “After my *début* in the very small part of *Tressel*”—wrote the son almost forty years later—“he ‘coddled’ me; gave

me gruel (his usual meal at night, when acting) and made me don his worsted night-cap, which when his work was ended he always wore as a protection for his heated head, to prevent me from taking cold after my labours, which were doubtless very exhausting on that occasion, being confined to one brief scene at the beginning of the play!"

In the next summer Edwin Booth made a more ambitious trial of his wings, though in a more secluded scene — the court-house at Belair. There, on the evening of August 2, Mr. Edwin Booth and Mr. J. S. Clarke gave "Shakespearian Readings, Etc." The former's part of the programme included selections from "Richard III," "The Merchant of Venice," and "Richelieu"; "Hamlet's Soliloquy on Death"; and "The Celebrated Dagger Scene from Macbeth." The young men slackened the tension with "Etc.," for "during the evening they sang a number of negro

melodies with blackened faces, using appropriate dialect, and accompanying their vocal attempts with the somewhat inharmonious banjo and bones." Those fragments of Shakespeare, recited half a century ago in the Maryland woods, were probably ardent and faithful imitations of the elder Booth, but the imagination can paint no picture of his son as Brother Bones. Neither he nor any of his family — on the stage, at all events — ever had the gift of making people laugh.

### III.

DURING Booth's second season on the stage, that of 1851, he played again in "Richard III," but this time as *Richard* himself, at the National Theatre, New York. In his opinion his father had determined to test his "quality." His own account of the experiment is worth reading. "One evening, just as he [the elder Booth] should have started for the theatre to prepare for his performance of *Richard III*, he feigned illness ; nor would he leave the bed where he had been napping (his custom always in the afternoon), but told me to go and act *Richard* for him. This amazed me, for my experience as yet had been confined to minor parts. But he could not be coaxed to waver from his determination not to act that night, and as it was time for the manager to be notified, there was no course to pursue but to go to the theatre to announce the fact. 'Well,'

exclaimed the manager, 'there is no time to change the bill; we must close the house—unless *you* will act the part.' The stage-director and several actors present urged me to try it, and, before my brain had recovered from its confusion, they hurried me into my father's dress, and on to the stage, in a state of bewilderment." Someone heard the novice repeat the soliloquy, and he was soon before a crowded house. As no explanation had been made, the son was greeted with a great round of applause intended for the father. As soon as the audience discovered their mistake, they lapsed into utter silence and allowed the piece to begin. Although the difficultly placed young actor played as he had seen his father play, in look and tone and gesture, his achievement was something more than even the best of imitations, for the suddenly interrupted applause soon began again, and in a key which must have assured the performer



that he had won it for himself. He thus modestly concludes his own too brief account of the episode:—"My effort was not altogether futile, for it satisfied my father that his boy's prospects were fair for, at least, a reputable position in the profession. . . . Thenceforth he made no great objection to my acting occasionally with him, although he never gave me instruction, professional advice or encouragement in any form: he had, doubtless, resolved to make me work my way unaided; and though his seeming indifference was painful then, it compelled me to exercise my callow wits; it made me *think*! And for this he has ever had my dearest gratitude."

The character of *Gloster* has always been a favourite with actors. It is no wonder, since whoever wrote the play—let us for convenience say Shakespeare—could not easily have done them a better service. Against a necessary background of persons dramatically insignificant, and

the undramatic lamentation of queens and other distressed ladies of rank, who repeat one another as only Maeterlinck's people do nowadays, the author has thrown in dominant relief a figure of gigantic evil, an all-conquering fiend in gorgeous raiment. We cannot recapture the old performances of *Gloster* or the delight the old audiences felt in them, nor have we better means of recovering Edwin Booth's early renderings of the part in Cibber's theatrical patchwork called "Richard III." The effectiveness of that version is of the sort which perpetually tempts the actor to over-act. As Booth ripened late, it is probable that, in his younger, cruder state, he was a brilliantly docile pupil of a school not averse to violent effects. By the time I saw him, although there was still (and continued till the end to be) an ever-lessening degree of old-fashioned theatricality in all his impersonations, he seldom, even in "Richard III," played

obviously for points. Cibber, and all that Cibber typified, had long since been discarded. Booth's version of the original would have been still better than it was, had he taken the pioneer step, not yet taken, I think, of omitting *Richard's* proposal to *Queen Elizabeth*, which comes like a faded echo of the direct proposal to the *Lady Anne*. But that is a detail, though an important one.

Booth's dressing of the character — splendid, as *Gloster's* apparel is known to have been — proclaimed the man he represented. He wore long brown hair, cut straight across the forehead, and a ring on the third finger of his left hand. He reproduced the king's habit of sheathing and unsheathing his dagger. The hump was a suggestion, not an obstruction, of deformity. This *Richard* had "entertained a score or two of tailors" not only "to study fashions to adorn his body," but also to conceal the ill turn Nature had done him, and leave him a

monster solely in his mind. Even the moral hump was not obtruded. Booth remembered *Richard's* "dissembling looks" as well as "the plain devil" that rejoiced within him, but was never fully revealed except where the text demanded it. Some modern actors, following tradition, have made *Richard* confide too much in the audience. The audience got no direct information from Booth except in the asides and the soliloquies, which thus of course gained all the more by contrast. *Richard's* many entrances, most of them unreasonably well timed, gave Booth an opportunity that he richly used, of showing the apparent omnipresence of strong evil. A cheerful, brisk malignant, he strode here, there, and everywhere, about the stage, speaking and acting the lines in such a way as to show that the villain's life-work was his pleasure not less than his business. Into his smiling seduction of the *Lady Anne* he put enough of the ser-

pent to bedevil any daughter of Eve and rouse cynical thoughts in the sons of Adam. I, for one, don't believe the scene when I read it; but Booth's acting, if he was in the mood — for he was the most unequal of players — compelled belief until the episode was over. His bits of hypocrisy were delicious, and of an intellectual keenness that always drew smiles and a ripple of appreciation from the audience. Nothing in this kind could be better than the mock-humility with which Booth's *Richard* knelt and asked the *Duchess's* blessing, unless indeed it were the fine insolence with which he spoke the lines that follow the poor lady's "God bless thee": —

"Amen! And make me die a good old man:

That is the butt end of a mother's blessing:

I marvel why her grace did leave it out."

This light treatment of so much that

most *Richards* have treated heavily, was not only right in itself, but it contrasted sharply with the sudden thunder of the sentence pronounced on Hastings, with the threat against *Stanley*, and with the lowering tone and look Booth gave to that most royal snub : —

“Thou troublest me ; I am not in the vein.”

Many critics have praised, and praised highly, Booth's rendering of the dream and the soliloquy that follows it. As I remember this part of the performance, his mode of giving the soliloquy was a blot on an achievement made up of many perfections. The restraint, the tempered art of previous scenes, gave way here to a flaming theatricality that gravely hurt — though it could not destroy — the actor's consciousness and vivid revelation of *Richard's* tortured soul. In all of the same scene that precedes the dream, Booth was altogether

admirable. The dim light in the tent and the muffled drum without, conspired with his gloomy fitfulness and his sombre voice in the few words given him, to send out among all the spectators a message of foreboding — a feeling that the king foresaw his doom. The line,

“Stir with the lark tomorrow, gentle Norfolk,”

Booth spoke resolutely, yet with a curious sweetness and melancholy, and as if he already tasted the morning of his defeat. The fight and the fall were prodigious.

As a part of Booth's general conception — a conception in which the hump and the limp were minimised — it should be remembered that he always represented *Richard* as a man of restless intellect and great personal fascination. Also, departing wholly from the ruffian theory held by more than one famous actor, Booth seldom allowed *Richard* to

forget his kingship, but gave him dignity at his most atrocious moments. "I was born so high," cries *Gloster* to *Dorset*,

"Our aiery buildeth in the cedar's top,  
And dallies with the wind and scorns  
the sun."

These lines, the most exalted and the most imaginative in a play that, by Shakespeare's gauge, lacks imagination, mark the Plantagenet's consciousness of his rank. Taken with other utterances of *Richard's* towering pride, the speech might have been Booth's warrant for cloaking the king's crimes with majesty.



#### IV.

SOON after Edwin Booth's first playing of *Richard* he made an engagement with Theodore Barton, of Baltimore, to act any part given him, at a salary of six dollars a week. Valuable as the training probably was, Booth seldom succeeded in little parts or in plays other than tragedy. One of his direst failures was an attempt in pantomime with Madame Ciocca, who abused him in broken English for his awkward struggle to be graceful in a light and airy fashion. Excellent discipline, too, was this failure for a youth who had determined to become a well-graced actor and to make every fibre in his body expressive.

In the year 1852 the elder Booth, Junius and Edwin with him, sailed from New York for California. A week brought them to Aspinwall, whence they went up the Chagres River to Gorgona,

on a flat-boat that carried both passengers and luggage. They passed one well-remembered night at Gorgona, sleeping or trying to sleep in a hut, on trunks and wine-casks. The only woman in the party occupied a hammock. Each man held a pistol under his pillow. Edwin, unable to sleep, could see the natives sharpening their *macheetos*—"or long knives which they used to cut the tall grass in front of them as they journeyed on foot"—but could not understand their whispered talk. Rats ran about the hut during the night. In the morning the unrefreshed travelers rose and proceeded on mules across the isthmus.

After an engagement of two weeks at San Francisco, whose tentative civilisation may have seemed effete by contrast with the Booths' checkered progress to it, they went on to Sacramento. There, for his benefit, the elder Booth put up "Richard III." Next night Junius,

at his benefit, played *Othello* to his father's *Iago*. On the third night of benefits, Edwin took his as *Jaffier* to his father's *Pierre*, in "Venice Preserved." This very rhetorical but very interesting tragedy, although now unknown to the young play-goer, was an important portion of his grandfather's dramatic meat and drink. When the elder Booth caught sight of Edwin in his *Jaffier* costume—it was of course, black—he said: "You look like *Hamlet*; why did you not act *Hamlet* for your benefit?" Edwin replied,—“If I ever have another, I will.” At his next benefit, which did not occur until after the death of his father, he remembered the lightly spoken word, and played *Hamlet*.

Disappointed at the lack of a suitable theatre in San Francisco, and influenced also by the sudden coming of "hard times," the elder Booth, in October, 1852, started for New York. As Edwin was now in earnest to be an actor, his

father would not take him along, but advised him to go on with his profession in California. He took the advice and, when the hard times soon became harder, he agreed with Mr. D. W. Waller to go with him to a town or settlement called Nevada. There Booth first acted *Iago*. At parting, his brother Junius (J. B. Booth, Jr.) had said to him :— “Put a slug [‘a large octagonal gold piece of fifty dollars’] in the bottom of your trunk, forget you have it, and when things are at the worst, bring out the slug.” It was soon time to dig up the buried treasure. With ruin staring them in the face, the people of Nevada had not a penny for the fine arts, and the theatrical thermometer registered zero. The physical temperature was scarcely higher. Snow fell incessantly until the poor strollers were cut off from the world. One night, when the theatre had been “dark” a fortnight, Booth was walking along a

road where the gold-diggers had undermined the houses and left dangerous gulches. Suddenly, in the mud and snow and darkness, he came face to face with a man carrying a lantern. By its flickering dimness he made out the features of George Spear, an actor familiarly called "Old Spudge," who exclaimed, "Hello! Ted, is that you? There's a mail in, and a letter for *you*." The retarded courier had at last broken through the drifts and arrived on horse-back with the mail-bag.

"What news is there?" asked Booth. "Not good news for you, my boy." In the tone of the reply or the look of the speaker, the boy seemed to read an omen, for he cried out, "Spear, is my father dead?" The old actor led him back, half-crazed, to the hotel, where the kind friends who tried to calm him were none the less kind because they could not fathom his deep grief or understand his self-reproach for having allowed his father to go home alone.

Still the cold held, still the snow fell, and men considered what to do. Winter and misfortune had made equals in Nevada of "ruffian, gambler, labourer, and scholar." One day, as a group of the motley democracy stood at a street corner bewailing their outcast state, some one proposed that they should walk to Marysville. Among those who took up the gage were an actor named Barry and a musician whose violin, *à la* Paganini's single string, had been the theatre's whole orchestra. Booth added himself to the handful of adventurers; and together, the foremost being road-breaker, they tramped fifty miles across the snowy mountains. At the end of the second day they came to Marysville, where they disbanded. Booth went thence to Sacramento.

After more days of leanness and a hard though profitable apprenticeship at "utility" parts under the management of J. B. Booth and the Messrs. Chap-

man, in San Francisco, Edwin Booth had a great success as *Richard III*, played for the benefit of Fairechild, a scene-painter. *Sir Giles Overreach* and *Macbeth* were good seconds in public favour. *Hamlet*, although the managers urged it upon Booth, he consistently refused to play until a benefit was offered him. The careless pledge made to his father, had become "an oath in Heaven." J. B. Booth, in spite of his brother's triumphs, thought him still of a pupil age, and reduced him three times from star parts to utility. This apparent snubbing, as he once said to Mr. William Winter, was "a lesson for crushed tragedians." And Booth's unquestioning docility, no less than the power to act effectively to his father's audiences parts in which his father had long been famous, adapted to him Heine's saying about another youth of rich promise, that he had a magnificent past before him.

Booth went on briskly accumulating

his past by taking a trip to Australia in the year 1854, with Miss Laura Keene, a well-known actress of the time, and D. C. Anderson, a much older actor whose intimate friendship he had formed. On going aboard their brig, Booth discovered that two ladies had invited themselves to share his voyage and act with him in Australia. One was the captain's wife, who had been an actress and was then insane; the other, an actress of "heavy business" who was not without vogue in San Francisco. No one of the three player-queens had known the intentions of either of the others. When they met on the brig, with their respective wardrobes, the scene must have been comedy, broadening into farce or darkening into melodrama: the record doesn't tell us which.

The voyage from San Francisco to Sydney lasted seventy-two days, during twelve of which the vessel was becalmed. In Sydney Booth played a satisfactory



engagement, opening with *Shylock*, which he had never acted before. At Melbourne, which was less auspicious than Sydney, Booth and Miss Keene parted. He then took passage with Anderson and a few other players for the Sandwich Islands. At Honolulu, Booth—who had just fifty dollars in his pocket—hired the only theatre and brought out “Richard III,” “The Lady of Lyons,” and other plays. As the court was in mourning for the King of the Sandwich Islands, his successor could not go publicly to the play; but, on his signifying a wish to see Booth’s *Richard*, His Majesty was seated on the stage-throne, placed in the wings with a theatrical robe thrown over it. “His escort” — says Mrs. Clarke — “who were a Frenchman and a huge Kanaka, the latter wearing a military jacket, white trousers, and a long sword, stood by his side.” In the coronation scene Booth had to trouble His Majesty for the throne, which, as a

matter of fact, was but an arm-chair; and Kamehameha IV obligingly stood until Richard III was duly crowned.

Entertaining as was a good deal of the Sandwich Island venture, its gains were not enough to keep Booth from going back soon to California. At Sacramento, during the dramatic season of 1855, he "created" the part of *Raphael* in the first American production of "The Marble Heart." More hardships followed, ending in a second penniless return to Sacramento, which had played a curiously varied part in Booth's Western travels. Good friends, however, arranged two benefits, and in San Francisco he was given a third, at which he acted *King Lear* for the first time—in the Tate version, afterward discarded. September, 1856, ended the California period, which, with the Australian and Sandwich-Island nine months, had lasted a little over four years. "The world's rough hand" had, with roughest meth-

ods, in these four years at the world's university, fashioned a boy into a man and an artist. He had studied men and cities, as well as Shakespeare and the stage. Though he did not know it then, the day of small things, small cares, and meagre living, had passed: the many bright days of an illustrious career were opening before him. True (though this, also, he happily could not know), their brightness was to be shadowed—once almost eclipsed forever—by griefs of a kind to make poverty, anxiety for the morrow, cold, almost hunger itself, seem light and trivial annoyances. But fame was to be his inalienable possession; and fortune, won at first only to be lost, was to be won again in even larger measure, and used to his lasting honour. Better than the fame and fortune so soon to be his, more important, perhaps, than any other element in Booth's nature or training, was the fact that both the man and the actor were of a sort to crystallise

late. He had still, and knew that he had, a thousand things to learn, and he never wearied of the lesson. So that the Booth whom the world saw and his friends knew, in the eighties, was a much nobler creature than the brilliant, winning young man who, in the fifties, fulfilled the prophecy of his Californian friends and took the American stage by storm.

## V.

BOOTH's first Eastern successes were in Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, New Orleans, and other Southern towns. To Boston, however, he looked for a decision whether he should keep on as a "star," or "retire to the stock." "The playgoers of that city," Mr. Winter tells us, "were remarkable for refinement of taste and severity of judgment, and Booth assured me that he looked forward to his appearance there with trepidation." Such was his trepidation, such his modesty, that he wrote afterward in a manuscript note: "The height of my expectation was to become a leading actor in a New York theatre, after my starring tour — which I supposed would last a season or two."

On the evening of April 20, 1857, Booth appeared at the Boston Theatre, one of the very largest of playhouses,

in the character of *Sir Giles Overreach*. Not yet twenty-four years old, he was called to make his difficult essay before a small audience in a large theatre. Worse than this, many of the few present were white-haired, critical persons who had seen the elder Booth act *Sir Giles* in the fulness of his power. The spring night was chill, as spring nights often are in Boston. "When *Sir Giles* appeared" — so runs Mrs. Clarke's account — "loud and prolonged applause greeted him ; then (as he described it) the people braced themselves, self-satisfied, in their seats, as if to say, Now, young man, let us see what you can do for yourself. The play proceeded quietly until the fourth act, when the player was on his mettle. This Boston indorsement was to decide his future ; and with a nervous calm he reserved himself for the last great scenes. The effect was electrifying, the call genuine and spontaneous ; he knew his power, and felt that he was

safe. The next day his pronounced success was universally acknowledged, and the press was unanimous in his praise." Mr. Winter, who was among the young persons in the house, records that Booth "was completely victorious." In this, as in all his victories, he remained modest, but he no longer mistrusted himself or doubted his own powers.

From Boston Booth went to New York, where, at Burton's Metropolitan Theatre, on May 4, he began (against his will) with *Richard III.* In this performance, says Ireland, author of *Records of the New York Stage*, Booth "gave evidence of the highest order of talent." *Sir Giles*, *Shylock*, *Lear*, and *Romeo*, followed; *Hamlet*, *Claude Melnotte*, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, *Petruchio*, *St. Pierre*, *The Stranger*, *Lucius Brutus*, and *Pescara*. *Richelieu*, first played by Booth at Sacramento, in July, 1856, was also among the characters in another

"completely victorious" engagement. In measuring the value of Booth's New York success, it is well to remember Mr. Jefferson's statement about one aspect of the New York theatres in that very year. After speaking of his own engagement, in September, 1857, for "the leading comedy" at Laura Keene's theatre, he says: "It was my first appearance on the western side of the city. . . . It was looked upon as a kind of presumption in those days for an American actor to intrude himself into a Broadway theatre; the domestic article seldom aspired to anything higher than the Bowery; consequently I was regarded as something of an interloper."

August 31 saw Booth beginning another series of performances at the Metropolitan, which he followed with a second trip through the South and one to the West. In 1858, at the Richmond theatre, he met Miss Mary Devlin, afterward his wife. This gentle, beautiful



girl was a good musician and at least a pleasing actress, but left the stage upon her betrothal to Booth in 1859. On July 7, 1860, they were married by the Rev. Dr. Osgood at his house, No. 154 (now 113) West 11th Street, New York. In the winter of 1879-80 Booth went to the house and asked to see again the clergyman's study, in which, he said, he had "secured his greatest happiness." The all too short life of the two together was indeed a happy one. Very soon after their marriage, Mrs. Booth accompanied her husband to England, where they lived till September, 1862. Their only child, Edwina, now Mrs. Ignatius Grossmann, was born at Fulham, London, December 9, 1861. When the Booths came back to America, they made their home at Dorchester, Massachusetts. Although the health of Mrs. Booth had already broken, she was not thought seriously ill when Booth left her to go upon a distant tour. But they

never met again, for Mrs. Booth grew suddenly worse, and died on February 21, 1863. At Mount Auburn, almost a third of a century later, her husband was laid beside her. The beauty of Mrs. Booth's face was commemorated in one art by Eastman Johnson and W. J. Hennessey; in another, her virtues and the loveliness of her nature were finely suggested by Parsons, a true poet who is little read. Booth wrote of his loss to Adam Badeau:—"My heart is crushed, dried up, and desolate. . . . My child can never fill her place, for *she* was my child, my baby-wife. Every little toy of hers, every little scrap of paper the most worthless, are full of her because she has touched them. They recall her more vividly than the baby does. . . . She climbs my knee, and prattles all day long to me; but still she is not the baby I have loved and cherished so devotedly." Later in the same letter the mourner cries out that he needs "some

sign from her, some little breath of wind, nothing more, whispering comfortable words of her."

That Booth was capable of ardent friendship as of ardent love, he gave more than one gracious token. For Captain Richard Cary, one of his dearest friends, who was killed in the Civil War, he expressed his affection in a remarkable letter to Cary's sister, Mrs. Felton, of Cambridge. "But, above all" — this is a part of what Booth wrote, under date of September 11, 1862 — "the sad, sweet relic he has left me — the letter signed with his death — will forever be to me a source of consolation. It will keep forever fresh the truth of him who thought of his friend even on the field of battle.

"Richard was always in my eyes the noblest of men, and his conduct in the face of death proves that I was right in my judgment of him. He was a hero born; he acted as Richard Cary only

could act,—nobly, unselfishly, bravely. I knew it would be so ; I knew that he would be loved by all about him ; and I knew that if he fell, he would be found contented, grand in death. I can appreciate the feelings of him who felt like kissing him. . . .

“With dearest love for you all, in which my wife joins me, believe me ever your friend and servant, and your brother’s lover,  
EDWIN BOOTH.”

During the stay in England already spoken of, Booth played at the Haymarket his first London engagement. He began in September, 1861, with *Shylock* ; continued a not too successful venture with *Sir Giles Overreach*, and ended with *Richelieu*, a character in which he at last excited enthusiasm. From London he went to Liverpool and Manchester. At Manchester, Henry Irving—then a member of the stock company that supported Booth—played

*Laertes* to his *Hamlet*, *Cassio* to his *Othello*, *Bassanio* to his *Shylock*, *Wellborn* to his *Sir Giles*, and *Buckingham* to his *Gloster*. A strong element of Booth's ill success at that time was no doubt the deplorable attitude of the English toward "Yankees" and their cause.

Before Booth's return to New York, the Metropolitan Theatre, in Broadway opposite to the end of Bond Street, had become the Winter Garden. Beginning on September 29, 1862, Booth acted at the renamed theatre, with brief intervals, until March 23, 1867. This long period was principally given to a series of splendid and splendidly successful performances of the standard drama. During the first engagement Booth acted *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lucius Brutus*, *Shylock*, *Richard III*, *Romeo*, *Pescara*, *Sir Edward Mortimer*, and *Don Cæsar de Bazan*. Not a poor part (though some poor plays) in the list; and each piece was liberally put on the stage in accord with

the best taste of the time. The eager and continued zest of the public for these representations, the approval of elect persons in the community, and much thoughtful discussion in newspapers and periodicals, marked what would have been an achievement for any actor. For an actor not yet thirty, the achievement was extraordinary.

“Long afterward,” writes Mr. Winter, “referring to the Winter Garden engagement which his wife’s death had terminated, he said, ‘I had not yet got the control of my devil.’ His infirmity, which he had inherited from his erratic father — and which, in report, was greatly exaggerated — was an intermittent craze for drink.” This craze, although he resisted it, from time to time possessed him. From the day of his wife’s death, however, to the last day of his own life, he was, in this regard, master of himself. Mr. Winter, a precise and competent witness in the matter,

declares that not only did Booth never drink again to excess, but that, in the last thirty years of his life, he would very rarely allow himself alcohol even as a medicine. In tobacco he did exceed, and tobacco slowly killed him. "He could not live without it, and yet it steadily injured him." Toward the end of his career—that is, in the last four or five years of acting—his brain seemed to be growing numb. He rallied superbly again and again, but more and more often he sank into apathy; his speech suffered; and vertigo attacked him. This sometimes happened when he was acting, and then certain newspapers accused him of drunkenness. It is pleasant to know that, all and singular, these charges were false. Booth had got "his devil" under foot, and never let him up again into fighting position. It is good to know also that through grief he steadily grew stronger. His near friends observed too that he became

yet more humble, fuller of faith, more gentle, than he had ever been. His charities, always very generous, took a still wider scope. And to these virtues Booth, like the great sorrowful queen in the play, added one more "honour — a great patience."

For the next few years he needed, and showed that he possessed, the power to bear prosperity well. In 1863 Booth and his brother-in-law, J. S. Clarke, bought the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, which they directed together from the summer of 1863 till March, 1870, when Clarke bought out his partner. The two also undertook the management of the Winter Garden, associating with themselves — first as agent, then as lessee — an injurious person named Edmund O'Flaherty, but called William Stuart. Booth's first appearance on the stage after the death of Mrs. Booth was as *Hamlet*, on September 21, 1863. With that performance began



the new management of the Winter Garden. Toward the end of the engagement, which lasted till October 17, Booth played *Ruy Blas* for the first time. The twenty-eighth of March, 1864, was *dies mirabilis*, for on the evening of that day, at Niblo's Garden, Booth gave his first New York performance of *Bertuccio*, in "The Fool's Revenge." His acting in this character, then and afterward, transcended the effect of the theatre and—like Salvini's *Conrad*, Janauschek's *Lady Dedlock* and *Hortense*, Jefferson's *Rip van Winkle*, Duse's *Santuzza*, and a very few other impersonations that might be named—seemed almost to take its place in the personal experience of those who saw it.

Meanwhile the next important point in Booth's progress was his acting of *Macbeth*, also at Niblo's, with Charlotte Cushman as *Lady Macbeth*. Miss Cushman dissented from the subtlety of Booth's idea of the Thane of Cawdor,

and — so it is said — begged him to remember that “*Macbeth* is the ancestor of all the Bowery ruffians.” An antiquated view.

A special performance of “*Julius Cæsar*” was given at the Winter Garden on November 25, 1864, in aid of the fund to erect a statue of Shakespeare in Central Park. Edwin Booth acted *Bru-tus*, Junius acted *Cassius*, and John Wilkes, *Mark Antony*.

## VI.

AFTER a summer of preparation, "Hamlet" was put on the stage on the evening of November 26. Exceeding all American precedent for a play of Shakespeare, it ran one hundred nights. "It was more splendidly produced"—Mrs. Clarke thought—"than any other that had ever been presented, with the exception, perhaps, of 'King John' and 'Richard III,' many years previously, at the old Park Theatre, under the direction of Mr. Charles Kean."

"Hamlet" could not run now for half a hundred nights—partly, no doubt, because within the last twenty years there have been so many exponents of the Prince of Denmark. Although the other tragedies of Shakespeare have vanished, one by one, from the American stage, until "Macbeth" is the only one familiar to it, "Romeo and Juliet"—the tragedy of young love—and "Hamlet,"

Shakespeare's anticipation of the sadness and doubt of nineteenth-century thought, experience ever new incarnations. Now, as always, every girl must play *Juliet*. Now, more than ever, every young man must play *Hamlet*.

The young actor is not checked but rather urged by the fact that, within the last twenty years, at least a dozen more or less noteworthy *Hamlets* have been seen upon our stage. Not one of them was without interesting attributes. Not one was quite a failure — not even the epicene French *Hamlet* that splashed brilliantly about in the shallows of the character.

But if they have thus borne out the truth of the old saying that no player ever failed in *Hamlet*, they have also testified to the truth of what should be equally a proverb — that no actor makes his greatest success in that part. Sir Henry Irving might have done it (for he has more ideas to the scene in “Ham-

let" than any other three actors), except that he is clogged by a grotesquely unequal execution and by the inability to speak verse.

Of Booth's *Hamlet*, as of his other performances, it is strangely hard to write intelligently, or even intelligibly, for persons who never saw him, because there is no actor on the American or the English stage with whom he can reasonably be compared. Here is not to follow a mourning paragraph on the decadence of the stage. I should be sorry to make another Jeremiah, however unimportant, in the long line of those who, if their lamentations were to be believed, would convince us that the theatre has been degenerating ever since "Eliza and our James," and would make us wonder why it is not extinct. On the contrary, I see many hopeful signs in play-writers and play-actors. I do not despair even of play-goers. In saying that there is no one on our stage at all like Booth, I

mean merely that, with the passing of serious drama in verse, the sort of actor who could embody it has also gone. Booth represented the end of a tradition in acting as clearly as Burns represented the end of a tradition in song and ballad writing. The school to which he belonged began with Burbage, included Mrs. Siddons and the other Kembles, ended in England with Macready, and in America with Booth.

The word rhetorical, so often applied to this famous school, is not a misnomer if only it be remembered that their native and acquired mastery of diction—in the French sense—was but one means of expressing the ideal quality of the highest characters they impersonated. Whatever their excesses and exaggerations—and these have been the objects of much refreshing satire long before and long since “The Critic”—the players of the old, or rhetorical, or idealising school, were aware that poetic

tragedy is one thing and comedy of manners another, that verse is one thing and prose another. Booth, no more than his predecessors, would have subscribed to the notion that a character of Shakespeare may fitly be rendered like a character of Pinero or the younger Dumas. He was sure, if I may trust my recollection of his performances, that no creature of the poet's imagination is more remote from *l'homme moyen sensuel* (whom we now know and value as the man in the street), than *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*.

But, before considering Booth's manner of portraying the prince, let me say another word, however ineffectual, about the kinship with Shakespeare that revealed itself so nobly in his utterance of Shakespeare's verse. The Greeks were unanimous in their opinion that a voice is the actor's chief gift. Plato knew what he was about when he excluded from his ideal republic "the actors, with

their sweet voices.” For were they not mouth-pieces of those other inadmissible persons, the poets? So that one of Booth’s passports to Shakespeare land would have been the very means of stopping him at Plato’s frontier. As it was with the Greeks, so it was with the English actors from whom Booth derived — actors of the old, or rhetorical, or idealising school. When they did not inherit good voices, they strove to “build” them. They studied hard, moreover, not only to supply defects, but to cover irremediable faults. Betterton’s “voice was low and grumbling; yet he could tune it by an artful *climax*, which enforced universal attention, even from fops and orange-girls.” And with their voices, good, bad, or indifferent, but always trained, they learned to speak both verse and prose.

Booth, as we know, had by nature a beautiful and eloquent voice. Listening at the keyhole to his father, years of



association with his father, and constant self-training, with the aid of his own intellect, taste, and aptitude, brought Booth's delivery — especially of blank verse — to such excellence that, during the last twenty-five years of his career, when he was without an English-speaking rival in heroic parts in tragedy, his speech was a recognised model. It was as far as possible from an artificial or external elocution, which is a vain thing. It was equally far from the laborious diction of pedants. Booth did not mouth, or recite, or — except in bad moments — declaim, as it is to be feared the old actors often did. Nor did he croon or chant. He was simply a clear medium for the poet; and, with a perfect adherence to metre, he yet brought out the meaning as easily as if he had first learned to talk in iambic pentameter, unrhymed.

Quite different is the present practice. Mr. Henry A. Clapp, an eminent au-

thority on the theatre, and especially on the acting of Shakespeare's plays, touched upon this matter in a fine appreciation of Booth, contributed, not long after his death, to the *Atlantic Monthly*. "The vast majority of our players," says Mr. Clapp, contrasting them with Booth, "helplessly and hopelessly stumble, nowadays, in the attempt to interpret Shakespeare's lines : if they essay the rhythm, the meaning suffers a kind of smooth asphyxiation at their hands ; if they devote themselves to the thought, the verse degenerates into a queer variety of hitchy prose." In an interesting and much talked of Shakespearian "revival" last year, it was sad to see how the able, accomplished actor of the chief character narrowed and broke the imaginative horizon, how he dispelled the imaginative atmosphere of his author, by turning the verse portions of the text into "a queer variety of hitchy prose." And this was no isolated instance.

More remarkable still in Booth than the interweaving of thought and music which has become almost a lost art, was his wise economy of emphasis. *Hamlet's*

"A little more than kin and less than kind,"

*Macbeth's*

"The mind I sway by and the heart I bear

Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear,"

*Iago's*

"The wine she drinks is made of grapes"—

such lines are usually given, even by good actors, with a hammer-and-anvil emphasis that Booth, in his maturity, always avoided. In such cases he was sparing of emphasis, and relied upon the subtler means of inflection and quality of tone. Another refinement of art—but to tell everything is the secret of being a bore. It is enough to say that Booth

was a past master of Shakespeare's verse and prose. Like Salvini and Coquelin, he reversed the dreary modern triumph of the written over the spoken word, and proved to all who had ears that man may continue to be a speaking as well as a writing animal.

As to Booth's *Hamlet*. In the first place his father was right: he "looked like *Hamlet*." Gentlemen of the stage may make themselves up for the part like Mr. Beerbohm Tree, with light brown hair and beard, and the general aspect of bookish troubadours. Or they may "discharge it" in "your French-crown-coloured beard, your perfect yellow." They may put on the red wig of Fechter, which *was* red, by the way, and not at all "blond"—it is to be seen at the Players' Club in New York. But however they follow tradition, or defy it, they won't look much like *Hamlet* to all those of us who saw the dark-haired, unbearded *Hamlet* of Edwin Booth, his

pale face lighted with darkly bright, melancholy eyes. As he looked when he followed the *Ghost*, when he spoke the brooding phrases of "To be or not to be," when he took his wild farewell of *Ophelia* — at almost any juncture of the play, indeed, Booth's picture would have made a portrait of the Prince of Denmark.

The much discussed question of the Prince's madness, Booth settled as the vast majority of actors inevitably settle it. If *Hamlet* is mad, there is no tragedy — for him — except a purely physical one. If, as Dr. Furness holds, he is neither mad nor pretending to be so, why then we must wait a little while for a performer super-subtle enough to make that plain to the audience and at the same time get any effect out of his impersonation. Booth, as he once wrote to an inquiring correspondent, thought *Hamlet* mad only in "craft," and therefore, of course, represented him as simulating lunacy.

Booth's performance of the character, as a whole, probably kept to the last more of his early artificiality than was allowed to linger in other rôles; more of the mannerisms, or shall one say manner, of the old school. Moved by a laudable wish to preserve the imaginative remoteness of *Hamlet*, Booth began (and long continued) to play the part on stilts. Trustworthy observers noted, however, that, as time went on, he grew less and less stilted. A great comedian once said in my hearing that he preferred Booth's later *Hamlet* because he "left out so much" — in other words, because he simplified the poses, action, gestures, and "business" of the performance. With a less arbitrary and exalted method of showing the awfulness of *Hamlet's* experience and his aloofness from common life, came a more humanised tone in many passages and some whole scenes. The gradual change was strikingly exemplified in the tenderness of *Hamlet's*

manner toward *Horatio*, after the first act ; in the seemingly spontaneous grace of his speech to the players ; and in the enlivening, without hurt to dignity, of his last colloquy with *Rosencrantz* and *Guildestern*. Toward all his inferiors this *Hamlet* grew more gentle, and in his whimsical talk with the *Grave-digger* the gentleness was tinged with a sense of humour, that yet never lost the sense of rank. After years of the usual sardonic tone toward *Polonius*, Booth's *Hamlet* came to recognise that, though the *Lord Chamberlain* is a tedious old man, he is also *Ophelia's* father. The recognition, and the resulting access of kindness toward *Polonius*, were carried very far indeed in the newest *Hamlet*, last year.

Among things that Booth, in the comedian's phrase, "left out," was some unnecessary violence of voice and action in certain scenes. That this tempering process would bring gain, not loss, of force, was to be expected ; but the gain

at several points, notably in the scene with *Laertes* at *Ophelia's* grave, was wonderful.

There lingered always, however, as I have intimated, divers means and modes of expression that Booth might well have left out. More often than in any other of his performances within my recollection, he smote his brow, tragedian fashion, to signify deep thought. He "took the stage" more often, and adopted an undue "distance" of speech and bearing. And, though long before I saw Booth, he had exempted himself from the reproach of "making statues all over the stage," he was, perhaps, as *Hamlet*, too fond of attitudes that—perfect in their grace—had a pictorial rather than a dramatic significance.

Quite apart from the important, never-to-be-settled question (which he settled in practice on the safe side for poetry), of the middle way between the ideal and the familiar, Booth did not make clear



all *Hamlet's* yearning for affection, which reads itself into his talk in unexpected places. This was of course a matter of conception, and did not concern Booth's method, which easily compassed every subtlety of expression. It seems also to my recollection that Booth, in accord with a correct general principle of acting, tended to slur some of the abrupt changes of mood in *Hamlet*. Memory, however, after ten years and more, may play strange tricks with details of acting, and I may be wholly right neither in this impression nor in the equally strong feeling that Booth did not enough indicate *Hamlet's* strange freakishness of mood and manner. Not that he should have laid more stress on the pretended madness. Too many *Hamlets* have been "funny without being vulgar," in that part of their task; but surely, after *Hamlet* first sees the *Ghost*, a fever of unrest is one of his most frequent states. Taken together with the Prince's tre-

mendous, morbid activity of mind — which shows itself nowhere more plainly than in his habit of exciting himself with his own talk — this feverish temper is likely to produce at times so much of the excitement (dangerously approaching the aberration) of mania, that an actor who can truly represent it need be at little pains to provide symbols of counterfeited mania.

But, whatever many persons deemed the faults of Booth's method, whatever some persons deemed the defects of his conception, the countervailing excellences of the impersonation, regarded as a whole, distinguished Booth's *Hamlet* as the best that was known to the generation familiar with it. He thoroughly, almost constitutionally, it may be said, felt the deep essentials of the character; and he played it in a manner inexpressibly noble. That *Hamlet* shall be a self-examining dreamer, loving the foreseen order of the university, disconcerted by

the irregular happenings of the world ; that he shall be melancholy, first by temperament, then from circumstance ; that his resolve shall be too weak to make head under the burden laid upon a sensitive nature ; — these elements are of the essence. And these Booth blended and showed forth like the great artist he was. He made us believe in the spirituality of *Hamlet*, in his kinship with the beyond. Partridge, seeing Booth in the first scene with the *Ghost*, would never have exclaimed : — “ If that little man there upon the stage is not frightened, I never saw any man frightened in my life.” What Booth expressed was not physical fear, but a solemn awe, mixed with the passionate and pitying affection of which the word “ father,” as he spoke it, was most eloquent. From this scene on, a memorable trait of Booth’s *Hamlet* was a look he had, as if the *Ghost* had never quite vanished from his sight. When he spoke the words —

“And, for my soul, what can it do to  
that,  
Being a thing immortal as itself?” —

his face lighted, his voice rang with the certainty of an authentic revelation. Yet over the whole characterisation hung, like a dark vapour, the sense of tragic fate. Without that, Booth well knew, there might be the play of “*Hamlet*,” but most of *Hamlet* would be left out.

## VII.

“HAMLET,” withdrawn from the Winter Garden on March 24, 1865, was taken to the Boston Theatre, where Booth was acting, when, on April 14, his younger brother killed the President of the United States at the national capital. Rage and grief possessed the people of the North, and all thoughtful persons throughout the South knew that in Lincoln the South had lost its best and most powerful friend. Fifteen years later, in writing from London to an old friend, of certain persons of rank who had shown him kindness, Booth added whimsically: “You see, I’ve been so accustomed to the *purple*; with kings and cardinals have I hobnobbed so familiarly since my boyhood, that I’m accustomed to these honours.” But the actor of many tragedies came all unprepared to the tragedy that must, perforce, be acted in his own line. To

Booth, a loyal citizen, and a man of most sensitive nature, the shock would have been terrible enough, even if he had had no personal connection with it. His letters during the war to men who were in the field, and to their friends at home, make it plain that his country was inexpressibly dear to him. To Mrs. Richard Cary, the widow of Captain Cary, Booth had written, only a month before the assassination : "Yes, our news (no news now, though) is indeed glorious. I am happy in it, and glory in it, although Southern-born. God grant the end, or rather the beginning, is now at hand. For when the war ceases, we shall only have begun to live — a nation never to be shaken again, ten times more glorious, a million times firmer than before." To contemporaries, although we are prone now to lose sight of the fact, the loss of Lincoln brought not only sorrow and deep resentment, but doubt as well concerning the restoration of the Union. In per-

sonal humiliation Booth did not forget former hopes and present fears for the country. Surely, however, he might have been forgiven if the individual had obliterated the state. Since the death of Washington no calamity had so darkened the land, and for the moment it seemed as if all Booth's fame was of no use except to enable the millions that had seen him to recall the face of the man whose brother, the murderer of the wisest and best American, was being hunted to his vile death.

In his shame and his consciousness of the public feeling toward the assassin's family, Booth naturally thought that he should never act again. Months after the awful day, he wrote to a friend, "I have lost the level run of time and events, and am living in a mist." "He left the stage," says Mr. Winter, "and buried himself in obscurity, and from that retirement he would never have emerged but for the stern necessity of

meeting obligations incurred long before, and only now to be met by his active resumption of professional industry." Though this was no doubt the main motive, others only less honourable impelled him to return. On December 20, 1865, Booth wrote from New York to Mrs. Cary, concerning his decision :—  
"Sincerely, were it not for *means*, I would not do so, public sympathy notwithstanding ; but I have huge debts to pay, a family to care for, a love for the grand and beautiful in art, to boot, to gratify, and hence my sudden resolve to abandon the heavy, aching gloom of my little red room, where I have sat so long chewing my heart in solitude, for the excitement of the only trade for which God has fitted me."

Opinion had changed toward him, as he implied in this letter ; and whatever a welcome both loud and deep could do to comfort him, was done when the interrupted run of "Hamlet" was resumed



at the Winter Garden on January 3, 1866. At Booth's entrance the great audience rose, and gave him in look and act every assurance of good-will. Cheer followed cheer, and on the stage flowers fell upon flowers. Most Americans have the English love of fair play that has passed into a proverb, and the drop of quick-silver which Colonel Higginson believes to be in the blood of every American, distinguishing him from an Englishman, perhaps accounts for our more demonstrative way of making our traditional trait felt. So that everywhere, as in New York, Booth was told with cheers and praise that the stage and the public needed him, and that the sins of the guilty were not to be visited upon his head. Thus he fell gradually into his old mode of life and work, not forgetting — that would have been impossible — yet not brooding selfishly over the awful occurrence which had threatened to destroy his hopes.

"*Richelieu*," the next play to be revived at the Winter Garden, was given on February 1, with no less care and liberality than had been shown in the performances of "*Hamlet*." One of the most noteworthy "sets" was a room in the cardinal's palace at Ruelle. Arches composed the perspective, and the moonlight, coming in through a Gothic window, half showed, half hid, the sombre splendour of the apartment in which *Richelieu* waited for the packet that should put the conspirators in his power. This representation of the play was in large part the model for the still more beautiful and effective one at Booth's Theatre in 1871. At the same time, by the way, the novel device was tried of putting the French Court into mourning — in act fifth — for the supposed death of the cardinal.

On December 29, 1866, Booth and Davison acted together as *Iago* and *Othello*, with Madame Methua-Scheller as *Desdemona*.

On January 22 of the next year, after a performance of "Hamlet" and in the presence of a great company of spectators, Booth received a medal that had been intended to mark the hundredth night of the play, in 1865. The gold oval is enfolded with a gold serpent, its head pendent. Above are the skull of *Yorick*, crossed foils, and bunches of *Ophelia's* flowers. Round the oval is a ribbon of gold, bearing the motto, "Palmarum qui meruit ferat." Over all is the crown of Denmark, from which hang two wreaths of laurel and myrtle. In the centre, in high relief, is a head of Booth as *Hamlet*. The brooch to which the medal is attached, shows a head of Shakespeare between the tragic and the comic mask. The inscription on the reverse is: "To Edwin Booth: In commemoration of the unprecedented run of 'Hamlet,' as enacted by him in New York City for one hundred nights." But Judge Fullerton, in his address for

the committee of presentation, was careful to say :— “It was thought proper that this presentation should take place on the occasion of the play of ‘Hamlet,’ with which your name will ever be associated ; but the choice of time and place for this ceremony intends a recognition of your life-long efforts to raise the standard of the drama, and to cheer you in your future endeavours.” When Judge Fullerton had finished speaking, he hung the medal round Booth’s neck. Booth was in the dress of *Hamlet*.

The presentation committee included Major-general Robert Anderson, Agassiz, George Bancroft, George William Curtis, Charles A. Dana, and Bayard Taylor.

The days of the Winter Garden were numbered. On the night of March 22, 1867, Booth acted *Lucius Brutus* there, and it is supposed that the fire which is used in one scene of Payne’s tragedy communicated itself to the theatre.

Toward morning, at all events, flames burst out below the stage, and in a few hours destroyed the house. With it disappeared the scenery used in "Hamlet," "Richelieu," and "The Merchant of Venice"; Booth's stage wardrobe, including more than one article that his father had worn; a large and costly collection of theatre dresses, jewels, armour, and furniture; many books and manuscripts, several of the latter being important; and portraits of Betterton, the elder Booth, Garrick, Kean, Kemble, Macready, Mrs. Siddons, and many another player not unknown to fame. Only the associations of the house remained, but these long survived the destruction of the fabric that had made them possible. The bad acoustics and the bad optics of the house had been genially forgotten by persons who saw upon its stage the favourite performers of their youth. And play-goers who do not yet lag superfluous heard Jenny Lind at

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the Winter Garden, marvelled at Charlotte Cushman as Scott's Gypsy touched to finer issues, and were swayed by the strange, evil power, then waning, of Rachel, the greatest actress of her time. Those who delighted in Blake and Burton and Clarke at the Winter Garden, remember how the Comic Spirit was incarnated in them. Before the same lamps, as *Caleb Plummer* in "The Cricket on the Hearth," Jefferson discovered new secrets in his gift of imaginative comedy.

## VIII.

WITH the destruction of the Winter Garden ended Booth's first organised attempt to give the best plays in the best manner. With Booth's Theatre began a far more ambitious and more highly organised attempt to do the same thing. The corner-stone of the new house was laid on the eighth day of April, 1868, and the first performance — "Romeo and Juliet" it was — took place on February 3 of the following year. The building, which stood on the south-east corner of Twenty-third Street and Sixth Avenue, was of granite, and measured one hundred and eighty-four feet in length. One hundred and fifty feet of this made the front of the theatre proper, and the rest formed the width of a wing used mainly for shops and studios. The theatre was solidly built, and elaborately decorated with frescoes, statues, and busts of famous actors,

among them Gould's well-known representation of the elder Booth. This was midway of the wide stone staircase leading from the south end of the lobby to the balcony. Above the balcony was a second balcony, and above that an "amphitheatre." The lobby was paved with Italian marble. The house seated seventeen hundred and fifty persons, and there was standing room for three hundred more.

Behind the curtain everything was done with the same liberal hand and measure. The footlights were fifty-five feet from the back wall, the arch was seventy-six feet wide, and beneath was a pit, thirty-two feet deep, blasted out of the solid rock, into which a scene could be lowered out of sight. The flats were raised and lowered by hydraulic rams, under the stage.

The *Juliet* to Booth's *Romeo* on the opening night was Miss Mary M'Vicker, a step-daughter of J. H. M'Vicker, long



at the head of theatrical management in Chicago. Miss M'Vicker was a person of energy and intelligence, who had much practical knowledge of the theatre and a slight but serviceable gift for acting. Later in the year 1869 she took permanent leave of the stage, and on June 7, at Long Branch, was married to Booth.

As stage lovers, from the Veronese to the Lyonnais, were not for Booth or he for them, we must conclude that his extraordinary good looks, his reputé as an actor, a good company, and a rich "production" in the imposing new house, reconciled the public to a ten weeks' run of "Romeo and Juliet." It gave way on April 12 to "Othello," Booth playing the Moor; and on May 31 Edwin Adams, a popular young actor of that day who had been the *Mercutio* and the *Iago* of the two revivals, began a two months' round of romantic characters. Mr. Jefferson, as *Rip van Winkle*,

finished the summer. Miss Kate Bateman, Hackett — the only great *Falstaff* of the second half of the nineteenth century — and Mrs. Waller, followed Mr. Jefferson ; and only on January 5, 1870, did Booth again appear at his own theatre. This reappearance was in “*Hamlet*” (with “stage accessories” that were “fine beyond precedent”), which ran till March 19. After Booth’s *Hamlet*, *Sir Giles Overreach*, *Claude Melnotte*, and *Macbeth*, John S. Clarke played a series of comic rôles — among them *De Boots* and *Mr. Toodle* — from April 18 till May 28. During the same year Mr. Jefferson acted *Rip van Winkle* one hundred and forty-nine times in succession. In 1871 Booth gave “*Richelieu*,” with unexampled splendour ; “*Othello*,” and “*The Fool’s Revenge*” ; revived “*Winter’s Tale*,” with Barrett as *Leontes* ; and acted *Benedick* for the first time in New York. Barrett played *James Harebell* in “*The Man of Airlie*” (taken from a

German piece called "Laurel Tree and Beggar's Staff"); and John E. Owens, *Caleb Plummer*. These performances would have been enough to distinguish any theatre, but the year was made yet more remarkable by Miss Cushman's return to the stage after an absence of ten years, and by a notable revival of "Julius Cæsar." Miss Cushman showed unabated power as *Queen Katharine*, *Lady Macbeth*, and *Meg Merrilies*,—the three characters with which her fame is mainly associated. "Julius Cæsar," in which at different periods during the run Booth played *Brutus*, *Cassius*, and *Antony*, was given eighty-five times between Christmas Night, 1871, and March 16, 1872.

This dry enumeration, read in the light of understanding, is a noble and pathetic bit of history. Noble, because it is a record of what, in the finest spirit, a great actor tried to do for the stage, and therefore for the country. Pathetic,

because the high attempt failed. Audiences, large in numbers and excellent in quality, were seldom lacking at Booth's Theatre; nor did Booth's ambition and the performance in which it took shape, ever lack recognition and praise from the discriminating few or the capricious many. But the cost of the theatre had been more than a million dollars, the running expenses were enormous, and Booth had not the gift of financial management. So disaster was the result, in spite of constant public support given to the enterprise, and in spite of the very large sums that Booth made on the road and sent home to his treasury. Mr. Aldrich has preserved the following letter, which Booth wrote to him on one of these trips.

“PORTSMOUTH, Octr. 3rd 1872.

“*My dear Tom:*

“Tho' centuries have flown since we last corresponded and—for aught we know—both of us may be dead and gone

—I feel as if you were close at hand today. In this quaint old town — your native heath, I believe — everything recalls the ‘Bad Boy’ T. B. Esquire. — It’s raining like blazes and things in general look blue. I hope I shall not be obliged to call on you for aid to get away. Of course you know where I am to ‘Hamlet’ to-night — a man (the janitor, or proprietor, perhaps) tells me you went to school just under the old Temple — it seems to me that it must have been hundreds of year ago. — I wish you were here to show me about the city — I am sure there is much of curious interest here; I like these old ‘bygones’ and the really excellent modern hotel seems out of its element altogether, while the Temple seems quite at home. I bought some Brette Harte paper collars (!) here and asked for some ditto Aldrich cuffs, but to its shame be it spoken the town does not contain them. A prophet at home, you know the proverb. . . .

I began to write this very close thinking I had much to say, but you know it is my habit to begin quite vigorously and terminate abruptly — you may remember an evening at Fields' — langsyne. All I can do now to keep up appearances is to tell you what I've been doing since we parted. You know I then had a fine place at Long Branch — which I transferred to my partner (Robertson) as so much cash in buying his interest in the theatre — he owned  $\frac{2}{3}$  of it. I owned several other pieces of real estate, all of which he took at a very liberal figure — and I thus got free from a sense of restraint that annoyed me excessively. Since then the theatre has been doing well and at present is in a glorious way with Boucicault, while I am off scouring the provinces for the stray ducats that lie around loose. So far my trip has been very pleasant in every way — with here and there a weak town, but the old-fashioned fun I have

in extemporising stages and scenes compensates me for the 'sparcity' of *shekels*. It reminds me very much of my early California tramps; I have my own company—no rehearsals, and the travel is done by short stages of not more than two hours the longest.—I do wish you were here tonight—to see me bury Ophelia 'above board'; there is but a six  $\times$  six square hole, into which my large-legged Laertes could not leap—and so I've 'faked' (as we mummers style a make-shift) a grave above the stage; Ophelia's coffin, mind you, is packed with Yorick's skull and bones, swords, spears, etc., while we travel—this is a secret, but you're behind the scenes.

“Well—finding myself without a home I bought a place at *Cos Cob* (go to your map and scour Connecticut)—quite near old Putnam's pump at Horse-neck—from *Barras*, author of *Blk Crook*. Here's a mingling of black spirits and

grey for you ; Barras and Shakespeare, Booth and Ballet, legs and legitimate ! It's a delightful spot — a fairy spot — with every kind of pleasure close at hand, boating, bathing, fishing and driving at your very doorstep. I hope — should you ever pass that way (on the Boston & New Haven R.R.) you'll ask to be dropped at Cos-Cob — an hour's ride from New York — and see my retreat ; I hope to pass a good long vacation there this next spring and summer . . . .

“I hope your dear ones are all well and that your home is as happy as you deserve and desire it to be, in which pious wish Mary joins me.

“With kisses for those twa siller heads, and love to yourself and wife,

“Ever Yours,

“NED.”

It will be seen from this letter that Booth, by buying out his partner, had



become sole proprietor of the theatre. In 1874 he failed. A detailed account of Booth's Theatre may be found in Mr. Winter's *Life and Art of Edwin Booth*. Mr. Jefferson once said of his management: "Booth's theatre is conducted as a theatre should be—like a church behind the curtain and like a counting-house in front of it." It is evident from the facts, however, that the accounts were a good deal muddled.

## IX.

ALL through the troubled time Booth showed the courage, the constancy, and the consideration for others, that were a part of his nature. The published letters to his little daughter, which begin in 1869, are peculiarly touching. Many — most, fathers less burdened, would have had a less intimate care for a little girl's work and play. She must apply herself to French, and write him another letter all in that language; she should learn to skate — *he* is doing so; he tries to plan for their meeting. Once he preaches a little homily drawn from his own young experience; and at another writing he asks, in the very thick of his troubles: — “Don't you think it jollier to receive silly letters sometimes than to get a repetition of sermons on good behaviour? It is because I desire to encourage in you a vein of pleasantry, which is most desirable in one's corre-

spondence, as well as in conversation, that I put aside the stern old *father*, and play *papa* now and then." Two of the letters are from St. Valentine, a canary bird, and Pip, a dog. Each is full of spirited onomatopœia, such as would delight a child, and in the originals Booth had drawn small figures of the correspondents for whom he merely "held the pen." In the same year, the year of the bankruptcy, he speaks out his real mind to his friend Bispham :—

"This is by no means the heaviest blow my life has felt, and I shall recover from it very shortly if my creditors have any feeling whatever. . . .

"I gave up all that men hold dearest, wealth and luxurious ease ; nor do I complain because that unlucky 'slip 'twixt the cup and lip' has spilled all my tea.

"With a continuance of the health and popularity the good Lord has thus far blessed me with I will pay every

'sou,' and exclaim with *Don Cæsar*—though in a different spirit—'I've done *great* things.' If you doubt me, ask my creditors!"

As Burke's words were things, so Booth's became deeds. He gave up to his creditors the whole of his private and personal property, not excepting what might, one conjectures, have been fairly kept as "tools of his trade," namely books and theatrical wardrobe. Then, after a rest at his wife's house at Cos-Cob (already spoken of in the letter to Mr. Aldrich), Booth applied all his splendid powers to the payment of his debts. But never again did he act as his own or anyone else's manager.

He seems not even to have stipulated for decent competence in supporting players or decent taste and liberality in the "production." The "stars" in performances of Shakespeare to-day are not always of the first magnitude, and the other members of the cast would some-

times have been less unsuccessful in other lines of life ; but so well trained are these flesh-and-blood marionettes of ours, so gorgeous are the dolls'-clothes lavished on their backs, so handsome is everything about them, so brisk and crisp the stage management, that no one who did not see Madame Janauschek, Booth, and Signor Salvini — after the adoption of his biglottic system — can be made to understand what sort of background, human and scenic, was provided for their genius.

In those years, at all events, during which I used to see Booth often — the years from 1878 to 1891 — among the few exceptions to the wretchedness of his presentment were his appearances under the direction of Lawrence Barrett, and at the Boston Museum, where he was assisted by a company whose general competence had only the drawback of a comparative inexperience in playing Shakespeare. On most other occasions the courts of the Plantagenets, the

Doges, and the Macbeths, were forlorn and homesick places. Court, battle-field, rialto, and blasted heath, were peopled alike by the dreary, impossible theatre-folk whom Booth himself used to call "dogans." "Dogans," pray mark, was a class term given in humourous tolerance to ignorant, conceited players. Of individuals Booth spoke with unvarying kindness, treated them with the utmost consideration, and praised them when he could. As his assistants were by no means all dogans, he could often give himself that pleasure. Perhaps all of them, even the dejected supers — who does not remember those Venetian senators? — would have brightened up a little if the scenes and chairs and tables and clothes had been better. "Hamlet" seems in recollection the worst of all as to these matters. I remember one piece of haggard scenery held in place by the visible hand of a shifter; I remember a certain burly, Milesian *Horatio*; and a fat *Queen*

that roamed about her halls, clad, for outer garments, in what appeared to be a purple piano-cover bordered with gilt paper. And alas, poor *Ghost* ! I can never forget one of him who, in solemnly lifting up his arm, disclosed, through the green gauze in which, twenty years ago, ghosts always travelled, that he had wisely put on a red flannel shirt before revisiting the Danish climate. It was an honest ghost, that let me tell you.

People complained of the untoward conditions, but, though complaining, they went still to see the gracious person who was so ill attended. He himself moved about the stage, apparently unconscious of any lack ; always admirably dressed for his part ; letter-perfect in the lines, and acting always with a conscience even when he could not command his mood. Perhaps the poor support and shabby appointments enabled Booth to make more money — there were those who said so ; and certainly

his managers profited by the arrangement. One calumny, however, should be forever silenced — the charge that Booth feared the rivalry of able players, and preferred to shine by contrast, like Queen Elizabeth among her ugly waiting-maids. On the contrary, not only did Booth in his own term of management call about him the best people that money could hire, but he was always glad to act with the greatest of his contemporaries. It was not a self-distrusting or weakly jealous man who acted with Salvini, Janauschek, Ristori, Cushman, Irving, Davison, and several other Germans of high repute in their own country. With Miss Cushman Booth once acted two weeks in different plays; with Mr. Irving for six weeks, alternating the parts with him in "Othello"; with Madame Modjeska during a whole season. It was generally observed that, the more formidable Booth's "opposite," the better he played. As to jealousy, if



he felt it, he was not least an actor in his concealment of it. In "the profession" he was renowned for kindness and fair dealing, as well as for an open-handed charity that was remarkable even in a calling famed for generosity. And two of the distinguished persons with whom he played, have told me that they found his courtesy almost unexampled. He was always ready to adopt their "business" or their arrangement of a scene. "He was willing to do anything except come to rehearsal."

In the fall of 1875, then (later than he had intended, on account of a serious accident at Cos-Cob), Booth began his brilliantly successful struggle to pay his debts and to make another fortune. From that time the outward history of his life is little but the record of tour after tour in the United States, varied with two successful visits to England and a brief professional experience in Germany which was, perhaps, the highest triumph in his forty years of acting.

On October 25, 1875 — he was released from bankruptcy in March of that year — Booth began an engagement at Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre in which he played for the first time Shakespeare's *Richard II*. Although it had been in Kean's repertory and in that of the elder Booth, the character had somehow fallen out of favour on the stage, and Edwin Booth had never seen it. He played *Richard II* exquisitely. During the same season he gave, for the first time in New York, Shakespeare's "King Lear" according to his own adaptation. As a young man he used the old stage version, made by Tate and modified by John Philip Kemble. This he gave up about 1860, allowed himself ten years to forget it, and then — in Chicago — withdrew "the hook" that Nahum Tate had put in "the nostrils of Leviathan," and began to play Shakespeare's *Lear*.

In 1876, beginning at Baltimore January 3, ending at Bowling Green, March

3, Booth gave fifty-two performances in the South, under the management of J. T. Ford. As he had not acted on the Atlantic coast south of Baltimore since 1859, the wish to see him was very great. People came from many miles round to Charleston, Richmond, and the other towns that Booth visited. Crowds welcomed him at every stopping-place, and often at way-stations the cars had to be locked, to keep out the multitude. Legislatures and "society" adapted their hours to Booth's appearances. "No actor had ever caused such excitement, or received such a tribute, in the southern country."

The next excursion was to California, from which Booth had long been refusing offers. Now he needed money too much to refuse. After a journey of twelve days from Chicago, he reached San Francisco on September 5, twenty years to a day from the time he had left it. The receipts of an eight weeks' en-

gagement in San Francisco were ninety-six thousand dollars. Mrs. Clarke states that for the season beginning in New York in November, 1876, and ending in Boston on May 19, 1877, Booth received one hundred and twenty-one thousand three hundred and fifty-three dollars. In 1877, according to the same authority, the debts were paid.

That year saw also the execution of a long-cherished design. Booth cut and arranged fifteen of the plays in his repertory. These, with many stage directions, and introductions and notes by Mr. Winter, were published under the general title of *The Prompt Book*. The first of the prompt books was "Richard III," the motley Cibber version of which Booth had given up in 1876. The other plays of the series are "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "Othello," "King Lear," "Richard the Second," "Henry the Eighth," "Much Ado about Nothing," "The Merchant of Venice," "Katharine and

Petruchio" (the little that Garrick left of "The Taming of the Shrew"), "Richelieu," "The Fool's Revenge," "Brutus," "Ruy Blas," and "Don Cæsar de Bazan." Each play-book contains sufficient directions for putting the play on the stage. There is none of that taking Shakespeare apart and putting him together differently which makes the Daly renderings an irritating puzzle to those who have more than a bowing acquaintance with the text. The Young Person was perhaps too much considered by Booth. For other reasons, of course, he cut the plays freely, and when they are cut they bleed. But Mrs. Pendenis, merely by practising the art to skip, might follow a Prompt-Book performance well enough with her copy of the dramatist; and in this edition, as a whole, Shakespeare is treated with such reverence as actors and managers have seldom paid him. It is worth noting here as a matter of record that, in spite

of Booth's long habit of playing the "restored" text of Shakespeare, Miss Marlowe gave her first performances of *Juliet* in a version that retained the old stage ending. This ending, however, Miss Marlowe soon abandoned. Booth himself went back to the Cibber *Richard* for one season, or part of a season, in the last few years of his acting.

One startling incident broke into the long years of Booth's prosperity. He was shot at in M'Vicker's Theatre, Chicago, on April 23, 1879. The play was "Richard II," and suddenly, just as Booth was speaking the prison soliloquy in the last act which begins,

"I have been studying how I may  
compare

The prison where I live, unto the  
world,"

a man in the first balcony fired two pistol shots at him. "Mr. Booth slowly rose" — says an eye-witness, in *The Dial*

of June 16, 1893 — “stepped to the front of the stage and looked inquiringly towards the balcony. He saw the would-be assassin, saw the pistol raised for a third shot, turned around, and very deliberately walked back out of sight. In the meanwhile, his assailant was seized from behind, and was not permitted to pull the trigger for the third time. What particularly impressed me about the whole affair was the coolness displayed by Mr. Booth. He was playing the part of a king, and did not for a moment forsake the kingly impersonation. After a short time, Mr. Booth reappeared, begged the audience to excuse him for a few moments longer, while he should speak to his wife, finally came upon the stage again, and finished the act.” Mark Gray was the name of the lunatic who fired the shots. Booth had one of the bullets mounted in a gold cartridge cap, and had engraved upon it — “From Mark Gray to Edwin Booth.” The

northerly humour of the inscription is said by his friends to have been as characteristic of him as his courage in the danger it commemorates. Four days after the shooting Booth wrote to Mr. E. C. Stedman:—"My temporary self-control gave way after a day or two to a highly nervous excitement—a condition similar to that which I believe Shakespeare illustrates by *Hamlet's* frivolity after the ghost is gone, and the terrible tension of his brain is relaxed. I have a ghostly kind of disposition to joke about the affair which is hardly controllable." Booth must have differed much from all other true artists if this and many another "emotion remembered in tranquillity" did not help to vivify and, as it were, to found his art.

Of a deeper tragedy than the moment's peril in Chicago, was what had happened years before at an evening party in New York. "There was another evening"—Mr. Howells tells the story in his



*Literary Friends and Acquaintance —*

“There was another evening when, after we all went into the library, something tragical happened. Edwin Booth was of our number, a gentle, rather silent person in company, or with at least little social initiative, who, as his fate would, went up to the cast of a huge hand that lay upon one of the shelves. ‘Whose hand is this, Lorry?’ he asked our host, as he took it up and turned it over in both his own hands. Graham feigned not to hear, and Booth asked again, ‘Whose hand is this?’ Then there was nothing for Graham but to say, ‘It’s Lincoln’s hand,’ and the man for whom it meant such unspeakable things put it softly down without a word.”

## X.

IN 1880 Booth made another visit to Europe. He had long intended it. A breakfast was given him at Delmonico's on June 15, at which many well-known men spoke — among them Mr. Jefferson, William Warren, Lawrence Barrett, Mr. Whitelaw Reid, Mr. Stedman, the Rev. Robert Collyer, and Parke Godwin. Mr. Winter read a poem. On June 30 Booth, with his wife and daughter, sailed for England. After a brief tarry at Stratford-on-Avon and a journey through Switzerland, in the course of which he saw and much disliked the "Passion Play" at Oberammergau, he returned to England. On the evening of November 6, at the new Princess's Theatre, Booth appeared in London as *Hamlet*. Since the choice of character, which was urged by Mrs. Booth, seemed in the eyes of many persons like a challenge to Mr. Irving, that may have accounted for the

temperate (verging upon frigid) tone of most of the professional critics, in such praise as they bestowed. Booth, it must also be remembered, thought ill of his own performance on that occasion, and — Americans were not yet the fashion. Many qualified judges, however, admired the American *Hamlet*; and, on the whole, both audiences and the newspaper press received him with honour. When the bill was changed to “*Richelieu*,” Booth’s performance excited an enthusiasm that the critics shared with the public. He wrote to Mr. Aldrich on Sunday after the first night of “*Richelieu*,” when he knew only the public mind.

“NOV 21 '80,

“ST. JAMES’S HOTEL

“PICCADILLY.

“*My dear ‘T. B.’*

“The sight of your dear old fist was like a metaphorical handshake. Since the receipt of your letter I’ve made a ‘double-header,’ as *Hamlet* and *Richelieu*.

*lieu.* The former called forth a series of silly articles — some for, some against me, but none worthy to be read twice. . . . All agree (even the worst fault-finders) that my English is perfect and that I'm master of blank-verse, but my *old style* of acting is out of date, etc. To read *all* the opinions would set you laughing hyena-like, for no two agree. . . . *Richelieu*, last night, set the people wild. Old Ryder, who acted many years with Macready, played Joseph with me and after the play disclosed that I had upset his idol. The dear old man was quite over-come by his emotion and could barely speak. To-night we called at Lady Martin's, once a famous actress [Helen Faucit], now a *nob*, and at her house met several who were describing me when we entered. If I have a long enough swing at these folks I'm pretty sure to divide the current of opinion — if I do not succeed in turning it entirely. The actors all wel-

come me with kindly greetings — something very unusual. The company is as good as any in London and the best here is far worse than those we complain of in America. . . . Boughton has been here twice and has seen me in both parts — I've been too busy to visit him yet. Dined once with Smalley and met Lady Gordon, Huxley, and a nephew of Macaulay. The first named and Mary have exchanged calls several times, but the rest of London is still out of town, I'm told, still we've had a peep at *Nobbydom*.

“Our passage over was like a sail up the Hudson — so with the Channel, which we crossed three times. Had no occasion to hunt up ‘Galloot’ — for when I decided to appear this fall in London, I deferred my continental trip and contented myself with a flying visit (a sort of bird's-eye-view) to Ammergau ; with the *Passion Play* I was rather disappointed — I could not get rid of the

theatrical effect of it, of the truly *dramatic*, or religious (of which I've read so much), there was very little perceptible. I have twice written and shall telegraph my protest against its being produced at *Booth's*, for it is a subject out of place in the play-house. Indeed I think it has lost whatever sacred sentiment it may have possessed at Ammergau. The Sunday papers are full of kindlier notice, (of Richelieu) than they had last weeks but not 'till to-morrow will I know the verdict of the standard papers. You know that 'first nights' occur on Saturday here and not till Monday does a poor devil know his fate. But the universal howls of approval that shook the theatre last night and what I've already heard to-day — assure me that 'I've got 'em !'

“Did you ever use a stylographic pen? Don't! I've two I'd like to lend, lose, or give away to some 'dearest foe' — but the derved things cling to me and

ink my taper tips. I can't get rid of 'em, and the worst of it is they've spoiled my use of other pens. Kill the first man that offers you one — especially if he be an agent for their sale. . . .

“Some day send me another line or two. 'Tis uncertain how long I shall remain here, and what my future movements will be.

“You see below an illustration of my stylographic abilities — ain't I smart !

“D—————N  
the pen !

“Mary and Edwina join Edwin in his love to you all and to the two twins, too.

“Ever and forever,

“E. B.”

On Christmas Eve Booth said in a letter to Mr. Stedman that “Richelieu” had “warmed them up,” but that in his opinion the houses would have been quite as full if he had kept on with

“Hamlet.” He wrote also that, “outside of the *press*,” he had had “all that one’s heart could desire in the way of courtesy and encouragement.”

“Lear” was given with extraordinary success on February 14, 1881. E. L. Blanchard, a well-known and influential critic of the time, after naming—in *The Era*—several passages in which “Booth’s delivery and acting were superb” added, “We are disposed to say that nothing finer of the kind has been known upon the English stage.” Like praises came from many other critics. Among the distinguished persons who saw Booth do *Lear* in London, were Dean Stanley, Charles Reade, and Lord Tennyson. The poet asked the player to dine with him, and remarked at dinner, with his island frankness, “Most interesting, most touching and powerful, but not a bit like *Lear*.”

The engagement at the Princess’s



ended on March 26 with "The Merchant" and "Katharine and Petruchio." Booth now proposed to Mr. Irving to give a number of parts in a series of morning performances at his theatre, the Lyceum. Mr. Irving immediately accepted the proposal, but soon suggested that the performances should be given at night, that "Othello" should be the only piece, and that he and Booth should alternate the characters of *Othello* and *Iago*. This generous suggestion Booth gladly accepted, and made his first appearance at the Lyceum on the 2d of May, 1881. He played the *Moor*; Mr. Irving, for the first time, the *Ancient*. Miss Terry was *Desdemona*. The densely crowded house seemed to contain everybody of importance then in London, and, in spite of doubled prices, it continued to be crowded until June 19, when the joint performances ended. It was a cruel stroke of fortune that this delightful engagement, in which

everything was done for Booth's honour and pleasure, should have been played under a shadow that dimmed all the brightness. Mrs. Booth had long been ill of a distressing malady. During the engagement at the Princess's Booth had written to a friend : — " Add to this [the nightly acting of *Lear*] the anxiety on Mary's account, and loss of sleep, and you may guess how *sane* I am. I sometimes feel as though my brain were tottering on the verge. Perhaps acting mad every night has something to do with it. I once read of a French actress who went mad after a continued run of an insane character she personated." Now, in June, Mrs. Booth had grown so ill that her return to America was thought necessary. On the thirteenth of the following November Mrs. Booth died in New York.

After Booth's return from England he lived in New York, and made frequent visits to his mother, at Long Branch ;

and to old friends. The dramatic season of 1881-82, beginning on October 3 at Booth's Theatre, he passed in America.

On New Year's Day, 1882, Booth sent Mr. Aldrich an odd gift, with the subjoined letter. Mr. Aldrich kindly allows me to use his explanatory note as preface:—

“Mr. Booth afterward gave me a different version of the story. An eccentric old party named Buggles invented an instrument to imitate the crowing of a cock—to be used in *Hamlet*, Act I, scene 1. The imitation was so perfect as to throw the audience into convulsions of laughter. After one night's trial, Booth didn't dare to use the toy, and the horrid thing—it was a sort of trumpet with pneumonia—was sent to me. No one but the inventor however, could work it. I think that was its only commendable feature.

“T. B. A.”

“*Dear Tom,*—

“I’ve concluded to dispense with the *Kok* in Hamlet. Therefore I send it to you for the edification of ye twins and the delight of their parents—at early dawn. This remarkable instrument will crow you like any sucking hen, if properly manipulated; but how that’s done I’m at a loss to tell. All that I know about it is that its creator, a Mr. Buggles, put it to his lips and set all the cocks acrowing, one dark night, in [word illegible]. To aid Buggles and avenge myself on some fraternal foe (or friend) I bought the infernal thing and promised to use it in Hamlet as an especial advertisement for him. After the darling came into my possession and Buggles had vamosed I forgot the secret of its crow, so couldn’t use it to scare my Danish daddy’s shade. Then I determined to bestow it on some one I loved, some one with children, boy-children, *twins*, in order to keep my memory alive in the brain of their Papa.

“So, here it is! Aren’t ’em pretty?”

“When you’re thirsty ’twill serve for lager. Buggles believes his bully old fortune is made by Booth buying his *blooming* bugle!

“Ta-ta!

“Till time stops

“Yours

“H. N. Y., 1882.”

“EDWIN.

June 26, 1882, found Booth in England again, beginning a second and highly successful engagement, devoted to “Richelieu” and “The Fool’s Revenge,” at the Princess’s Theatre. After this ended, on August 5, Booth went over to Switzerland with his daughter, and then — on September 11 — began a tour of the provinces which the illness of Mrs. Booth had rendered impossible the year before. In Dublin, although people compared Booth’s *Hamlet* unfavourably with the impersonations of Mr. Irving and Barry Sullivan, the actor himself

was heartily welcomed and his acting, in general, much applauded. At Aberdeen, at Dundee, and at Edinburgh, "the audience rose and cheered him at the end of his performances." Everywhere the managers asked him to return.

In December of that year Booth wrote to Mr. Anderson :—"Saw 'Much Ado'—the finest production, in every respect, I ever saw. Terry is *Beatrice* herself; Irving's conception and treatment of the part [*Benedick*] are excellent."

On December 27 Booth left London for Berlin, where, on January 11, 1883, he began an engagement at the Residenz-theater. This was renewed, on the twenty-third, for twelve additional performances. No "starring" tour was ever more modestly made than Booth's in Germany, or with less help from puffs, direct, oblique, or circumstantial. The first American actor who had ever visited Germany used none of the means and methods of advertisement that are

sometimes thought peculiarly American.

“In the *Leipziger Tageblatt*”—wrote a correspondent of the New York *Nation*—  
“a newspaper otherwise filled with the gossip of the day, I found but a single brief paragraph on Booth before his representation of *Hamlet* in Leipzig on March 19. The theatre posters of the same date, as well as the theatre advertisements in the newspapers, contained nothing beyond the usual laconic announcement (not even in full-faced type, as is generally the case): *Erste Gastdarstellung des Herrn Edwin Booth—Hamlet:—Herr Edwin Booth.* Nevertheless, for the three evenings on which he played in Leipzig, every seat in the Stadttheater not occupied by the regular subscription audience could have been sold twice over.” At Berlin the fact that the Court was in mourning did not keep Booth’s engagement from being very brilliant indeed. The enthusiasm of the German actors was one of the

most remarkable and most gratifying elements in Booth's success. On the stage of the Residenztheater, at the close of the Berlin engagement, a member of the company made an address in English, and at the same time Booth was given a silver laurel wreath, bearing the following inscription:—"To Mr. Edwin Booth, the unrivalled tragedian, in kind remembrance of his first engagement in Germany, January and February 1883." Similar beautiful tokens he received at Hamburg, at Bremen, and at Leipzig. In these cities, at Hanover, and in Vienna, there were very few opposing voices to the consensus, critical and popular, of approval that was both loud and deep. In a letter from Berlin I find Booth saying:—"I shall be glad when I get through with this tour—it is terrible work, as I have mentally to recite in English what the Germans are saying, in order to make the speeches fit." In less than a month, how-



ever, he was won over to declaring:—  
“I feel more like acting than I have felt for years, and wish I could keep it up here in Germany for six months at least.”

In the same letter (to Mr. Anderson, February 18, from Hamburg) Booth writes:—“The actors and actresses weep and kiss galore, and the audience last night formed a passage from the lobby to my carriage till I was in and off; yet I was nearly an hour in the theatre after the play (*‘Lear’*). Having had a surfeit of public applause—for it seems as though I had it through father, being with him so long—the most is but as little to me; but this personal enthusiasm from actors, old and young, is a new experience, and still stimulates me strangely.”

The significance of Booth's German success cannot easily be exaggerated. In Germany most if not all of Shakespeare's plays are acted; in English-speaking countries, a beggarly few. And although,

to our thinking, German critics of Shakespeare are often bent on proving themselves mad, especially when they write about "Hamlet," German actors of Shakespeare average to be the best in the world, and have had among them players as great as Devrient and Barnay. At least ten educated Germans understand English, to one educated Englishman, or American of English race, who understands German. Booth, then, played in an atmosphere that is charged with Shakespeare; in theatres that are stored with standards and traditions. He was right in regarding the German tour as the chief professional experience of his life.

## XI.

OF Mr. Booth off the stage I can say only, *Tantum vidi Virgilium*. I saw him just once in his own person, within the next few years after his return from Germany. The precise year and month have escaped me, but the scene was Park Street in Boston ; the time, a very cold and very bright winter morning. The street lay white under the sun, and the Common stretched white beyond. Doubtless there were other people about. I don't remember seeing any: I remember only that I caught sight of Booth at some distance, coming down the hill toward me. As he drew near, walking slow, I watched him intently ; and even when we came face to face, it is to be feared that I still gazed. There was no harm — Mr. Booth must long before have formed the habit of being stared at ! And it was a reverential stare. Such was my deep respect for him and

all he had done, that, not knowing then the fate of Charles Lamb's "merry friend," Jem White, I came near taking off my hat to a gentleman I had never "met." It is a question whether, at that moment, Booth would have perceived even such an attack, for he seemed to be looking in, not out, with the curious, introverted gaze of his own *Hamlet*. Let no one suppose that his expression was subdued to a professional melancholy, or that he had the consciously unconscious air which so often marks the celebrity in his walks abroad. But as he came toward me on that glittering, bitter day — stepping lightly though not quickly, his head a little bent and his hands in his pockets — he looked like *Hamlet* in a great-coat. I thought then that I had never seen so sad a face, and I have never yet beheld a sadder one.

Booth on the stage, I saw in many characters between 1878 and his retirement in 1891:—*Hamlet*, *Lear*, *Othello*,

*Iago, Macbeth, Marcus Brutus, Richard III, Shylock, Benedick, Petruchio, Riche-lieu, and Bertuccio.* I saw him often as *Hamlet*, often as *Iago*; in each of the other parts except *Benedick*, several times. *Richard II* he played for a few years midway of his career, and during the first half *Romeo* was in his repertory, though he did not give it often. *Cassius, Antony, Cardinal Wolsey, and King John*, he also acted. Early characters were *Sir Giles Overreach* in Massinger's "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," *Don Cæsar de Bazan, Sir Edward Mortimer* in "The Iron Chest," *Claude Mel-notte*, and *Pescara* in "The Apostate." After a long time of disuse, Booth "revived" these parts for a season or two, about eight or nine years before his death. I never saw any of them, and do not regret the loss of any except *Sir Giles*, which, by all competent accounts, Booth played superbly. And *Sir Giles* is of course a great part—outside of

Shakespeare there is none greater in English. As for *Sir Edward Mortimer*, *Pescara*, and *Brutus* (another of Booth's performances that went by me), why, George Colman the younger, Shiel, and even John Howard Payne, are dead authors. Genius can galvanise but not quicken them. As for *Claude Melnotte*, he is a lover suited to his *Pauline* or to *Laura Matilda*; and Booth, it has been already said, could not do lovers, real or unreal. Rome's *Antony* he played, but Cleopatra's *Antony* he did not even try to play.

As for *Don Cæsar*, he belongs to comedy quite as much as to romance; and comedy was not Booth's trade, though he had the good-will of a sinister, unnamed muse, half-sister to *Thalia*. Without her help his *Iago* and his *Richard* could not have been what they were. But to all except blind lovers of Booth's genius it seemed as if he kept comedy in his repertory only to show that, like

“Todgers’s,” he could do it when he chose. Whoever saw his *Benedick*, at all events in Booth’s last public years, without having read “Much Ado,” would not have made acquaintance with the true *Benedick*. As he took away most of the joy and all the *panache* from *Don Cæsar*, so he desiccated of all his mirth the Elizabethan courtier-scholar-wit whom Shakespeare chose to place in Messina. Intellectually, the performance was full of stimulus and entertainment. No one else could speak the very difficult and often archaic text as Booth spoke it, with all its variety, all its sweet yet lively rhythm. The soliloquies, which bristle with points of danger for everyone except a man of brains who is at the same time an artist in speech, Booth talked out quietly with himself and merely allowed the audience to overhear. One among many of these felicities was the inimitable cadence of afterthought with which the hearty affirmation, “The

world must be peopled," dropped into the mock apology, "When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I should live till I were married." This *Benedick* had charm, too, and careless ease; but he was a brown-tinted personage, who missed the essential nature of the character—a nature that, in terms of the wind, would be a fresh easterly with the sun shining bright; or, in terms of apples, "a pleasant tart." The war of Booth's *Benedick* with *Beatrice* was not a "merry war." He suggested rather the compromise that *Leonato*, acting upon a hint from *Beatrice*, offers her as the right husband: "Half Signior Benedick's tongue in Count John's mouth, and half Count John's melancholy in Signior Benedick's face." He was pleasant to see and very pleasant to hear, but he waked no laughter. His grimly frolicsome *Petruchio*, graceful and alert as it was, had the same defect. Yet Booth's friends delighted in his



mirth-provoking gift of telling good stories, and they often felt the presence of that humour in his conversation which shows itself occasionally in his letters. He says somewhere in a letter that comedy is excellent practice for serious actors, on the principle that those move easiest who have learned to dance.

It has already been said that, as an actor of heroic parts, Booth surpassed every rival in his own language. In Shakespeare's four chief tragedies there are three such characters — *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. *Hamlet* is beginning to be recognised as a character part. Now, tried by an absolute standard — not by the merits of other actors — Booth's renderings of *Lear*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*, fell short of what lovers of Shakespeare long to see on the stage, as his *Shylock*, *Richard*, *Iago*, *Richelieu*, and *Bertuccio*, never did. And they are character parts, all.

Booth's *Macbeth*, impressive, in many

of its elements, was less a unit and therefore less satisfying than most of his other characters of Shakespeare. He showed, often with startling distinctness, the *Macbeth* of physical courage and moral cowardice. Booth also made clear, to a degree, the *Macbeth* whose redeeming quality is such love as he bears his wife; the warrior of a barbarous age was scarcely visible; and the triumph of the impersonation was in Booth's indication of surface sensibility, with a bed rock of selfishness below. In this skilful psychology and in a few single scenes, Booth was at his best. The banquet scene, in particular, was appalling, and stood out even among his studies of episodes in which the supernatural plays a part. But Booth did not succeed in leaving a vivid, unified impression of a complex personality. It was as if he had been attracted by separate phases of *Macbeth*, instead of living with the character as he had lived with his *Hamlet*,

his *Lear*, or his *Iago*. The poet whom Shakespeare has incorporated with the murderer in *Macbeth*, had all his dues from the melody, variety, and imagination with which Booth spoke the verse.

If Booth's *Macbeth*, in comparison with other of his achievements, was unsatisfying for vague reasons, his *Lear* was incomplete for very definite reasons indeed. All that intellect, imagination, pathos, and a perfect command of histrionic means could do for the character, was present in Booth's rendering. Nor would the theatricality of the first act have been a serious objection to it: Shakespeare, following his original, is theatrical there himself. A more imposing physique and greater temperamental force were what Booth lacked for the exhibition of the upheaval and deracination of *Lear's* nature. Another modern actor had exactly the endowment for this character which Booth had not. Salvini—in words used by

George Henry Lewes, in his famous little book on acting, to lay down a general principle—Salvini had “the qualities which give the force of animal passion demanded by tragedy [by some tragedies, Lewes might better have said], and which cannot be *represented* except by a certain animal power.” As *Lear*, unhappily, the Italian was poor in other qualities “demanded by tragedy”—namely, spirituality and imagination; and there seemed even to be some confusion in his idea of the character. Booth and Salvini, fused, would have given the stage such a *King Lear* as it may some day see.

In *Lear* the honours were thus divided between the two actors. In *Othello* the balance was overwhelmingly with Salvini. Whether or not his conception was justifiable—and there are good arguments on each side—his performance of the *Moor* was by far the most moving portrayal of an heroic part that

I ever saw. It was literally the "whirlwind of passion" of which *Hamlet* speaks. Yet Salvini never lost control of himself or the character. He rode in the whirlwind and directed the storm.

Although Booth, as an actor of heroic parts of poetic tragedy, was so definitely superior to his English-speaking contemporaries, it was in certain character parts that he did himself most entire justice. In these, of course, he had formidable rivals, whose merits by comparison with his cannot be considered here. But as *Richelieu*, as *Bertuccio*, and as *Iago*, he was unapproached; and these impersonations were probably his best, with *Shylock*, *Richard III*, and *Hamlet*, as a good second group. In certain passages of *Lear*, *Hamlet*, and other characters, Booth's genius took a higher range of thought and imagination than can be found in *Richelieu*, or *Bertuccio*, or *Iago*. His renderings

of these three parts, however, were almost perfect. Exquisitely proportioned and almost flawlessly acted, they were, in sum and in detail, among the very few finest achievements of the modern stage.

## XII.

BOOTH'S years after his return from Germany were, as he once put it, "tediously successful." He revived some old parts, but played no new ones. He bought a house in Chestnut Street, Boston, and for a year or two he called it home. There, on May 16, 1885, Booth's daughter, Edwina, was married to Mr. Ignatius Grossmann. On the seventh of the same month, at the Academy of Music in New York, Booth had played "Macbeth" with Ristori. During the spring of 1886 he gave a few performances with Salvini in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia. I remember their third act of "Othello" as if I had seen it last night. It shines now in my memory as the greatest acting I have ever seen. Coleridge thought that to see Kean was like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning. When Salvini played *Othello* and Booth *Iago*, there were no flashes because

there were no periods of darkness. It was like reading Shakespeare by a mighty fire that rose and fell with the passion of the scene, and lighted a reflection of itself in the face of each beholder.

Even more talked of than the appearances with Salvini, yet far less worthy of note, was the "testimonial" benefit to Lester Wallack, at the Metropolitan Opera House, on May 21, 1888. Booth acted *Hamlet* and Madame Modjeska *Ophelia*—an auspicious combination. The Metropolitan, however, is much too large for anything except opera and spectacle. And in such a cast, assembled for one occasion, when everybody is somebody—John Gilbert was *Polonius* at the Wallack benefit, Mr. Jefferson and William Florence were the *Grave-diggers*—what should be teamwork disintegrates itself into a dramatic go-as-you-please. The more celebrities in such a company, and the more cele-



brated they are, the more the whole thing becomes a mere oddity, a theatrical curio which a man may be glad to say he has seen, but which he is not sorry to forget.

In 1886, Lawrence Barrett became Booth's manager, and at the same time directed a tour of his own. Beginning next season, the two acted prosperously together, except during 1889-90, until the death of Barrett, March 20, 1891. Although the prosperity was broken for a little by a stroke of paralysis, on April 3, 1889, which temporarily hurt Booth's speech, still he struggled on. In the season of 1889-90 he and Madame Modjeska appeared together in a round of plays. As their methods harmonised, the art of each gained from that of the other. Indeed, during the steady decline of Booth's physical powers, from the warning stroke until the hour of his retirement, his art won triumphs of a new sort. His knowledge, inherited and

acquired, of the stage and all its devices, was extraordinarily minute, and thus art assisted waning nature in many subtle ways. Occasional returns of strength there were, too, when Booth would act for a whole evening with much of his old spirit, and with a skill that had never before been quite so delicately fine.

But even his art, and will, and courage, could not keep up forever man's losing game with Death, which Huxley grimly depicted and stanchly played. Barrett's piteous end was apparently the signal for Booth to drown his book and break his staff, for, on the fourth day of April, 1891, in "Hamlet," quietly, and—as it was like him to do—without hint of farewell, he brought his public life to a close.

He was "tired of travelling," he said; he had been "travelling all his life." And so, for the two years of it that remained, he settled himself in his own

rooms at the Players' Club, the largely planned and beautifully appointed house with which, in 1888, he had made a home for the homeless and ever travelling profession. This great benevolence crowned a life that was as full of benevolence as it was of grief and triumph. No man could have been more mindful or more wisely mindful than Booth — in his gift of The Players — of the deep saying that every man is a debtor to his profession.

Booth was marked out by Fortune for honour and despite. He felt the strangeness of his lot, and reflected much upon the mysteries of life and death. Helped by his religion, a kind of stoical Christianity, he came to some definite conclusions in the face of all the mysteries. "All my life," he wrote to Mr. Winter, in 1886, "has been passed on 'picket duty,' as it were. I have been on guard, on the lookout for disasters — for which, when they come, I am prepared. There-

fore I have seemed, to those who do not really know me, callous to the many blows that have been dealt me. Why do not you look at this miserable little life, with all its ups and downs, as I do? At the very worst, 'tis but a scratch, a temporary ill, to be soon cured, by that dear old doctor, Death — who gives us a life more healthful and enduring than all the physicians, temporal or spiritual, can give."

In 1888 Booth wrote to his daughter: —  
"If there be rewards, I certainly am well paid; but hard schooling in life's thankless lessons has made me somewhat of a philosopher, and I've learned to take the buffets and rewards of fortune with equal thanks, and in suffering all to suffer — I won't say *nothing*, but comparatively *little*. Dick Stoddard wrote a poem called 'The King's Bell,' which fits my case exactly (you may have read it). He dedicated it to Lorimer Graham, who never knew an unhappy day in his brief life, instead

of to me, who never knew a really happy one. You mustn't suppose from this that I'm ill in mind or body : on the contrary, I am well enough in both ; nor am I a pessimist. I merely wanted you to know that the sugar of my life is bitter-sweet ; perhaps not more so than every man's whose experience has been above and below the surface."

Hawthorne, in the last year of his life, had a word on the same poem. He wrote to Mr. Stoddard, after receiving from him "The King's Bell" :— "I sincerely thank you for your beautiful poem, which I have read with a great deal of pleasure. It is such as the public had a right to expect from what you gave us in years gone by ; only I wish the idea had not been so sad. I think Felix might have rung the bell once in his lifetime, and again at the moment of death. Yet you may be right. I have been a happy man, and yet I do not remember any one moment of such happy conspir-

ing circumstances, that I could have rung a joy-bell for it."

Here are two Americans, at least, our greatest man of letters and our greatest actor, who have proved by comment on the same text that they are not open to the charge of unreasoning optimism so often brought against us. Since both expressions of Booth's philosophy were written before his attack of dangerous illness, in a time of unbroken success, and long after his bitterest experiences, they may be accepted as deliberate statements of his attitude toward life. But, whatever his general attitude and view, he gave no sign, even toward the end, of feeling poignantly the separate pang of the actor's lot. Booth's case, he must have known, was that of the dying painter before whose eyes all his pictures and all copies of them should be torn in shreds; of the dying sculptor whose statues and all casts of them should be hammered to bits; of the writer,

who, in his last days, should look upon a bonfire of all his books and all means of reproducing them. Booth knew that his *Lear*, and *Hamlet*, and the rest, would go down into the grave before him, and that the spiritual body of his art would crumble before his natural body. Yet, however much he felt the pity of his fate — and he must have felt it so far as the absence of all vanity or littleness would let him — there is no record to show that he lamented it.

Nor was there anything of the awful gloom and vacancy of spirit that came to Garrick, or of Mrs. Siddons's forlorn repetition — "This is the time I used to be thinking of going to the theatre; first came the pleasure of dressing for my part, and then the pleasure of acting it; but that is all over now." Instead, Booth looked back, not uncheerfully, over the long road that had led him from The Cabin and The Farm to the beautiful house of The Players. His thoughts

turned often to his father and to religion. He spoke of actors, living and dead ; of remarkable and comic happenings in his own career ; of his German tour ; of his friends. He took pleasure in the club, and in seeing the members of his family. His little grandchildren were a particular delight to him. To them, indeed, Booth's "last coherent words were addressed." "My boy," Mrs. Grossmann writes, "called gently, 'How are you, dear grandpa?' and the answer came loud and clear, in the familiar, boyish way, 'How are you yourself, old fellow ?' "

"As he lay dying"—says Mrs. Grossmann—"unconscious even of my presence, or of the fearful electric storm which was raging without, on that sad afternoon of the sixth of June, a glory seemed to rest upon his loved features, and I felt, in spite of heart-breaking grief, that he was at peace. And when the dark curtain of night had fallen,



and the storm had ceased without, and we sat watching and waiting for what we knew had to come we were startled by the sudden going out of all the electric lights in the chamber and in the street beneath. Was such darkness ever felt before? Alas! not for me."

Edwin Booth died at the Players' Club, a little after one o'clock on the morning of June 7, 1893. On the ninth, just before sunset, he was buried at Mount Auburn, beside the wife of his youth.

. . . . .

He was a great actor, a good Christian, a brave and much-tried man.

## SARGENT'S PORTRAIT OF EDWIN BOOTH AT "THE PLAYERS."

That face which no man ever saw  
And from his memory banished quite,  
With eyes in which are Hamlet's awe  
And Cardinal Richelieu's subtle light,  
Looks from this frame. A master's hand  
Has set the master-player here,  
In the fair temple that he planned  
Not for himself. To us most dear  
This image of him ! "It was thus  
He looked ; such pallor touched his  
cheek ;

With that same grace he greeted us —  
Nay, 'tis the man, could it but speak !"  
Sad words that shall be said some day —  
Far fall the day ! O cruel Time,  
Whose breath sweeps mortal things away,  
Spare long this image of his prime,  
That others standing in the place  
Where, save as ghosts, we come no more,  
May know what sweet majestic face  
The gentle Prince of Players wore !

THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH

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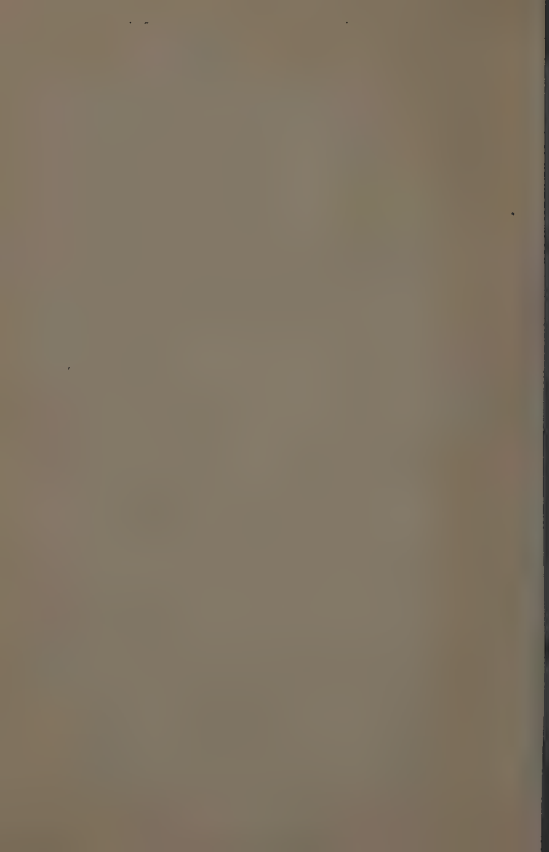
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